

BOY SCOUT HOSTS CLINIC FOR CHALLENGER DIVISION AT BLOOMINGDALE LITTLE LEAGUE

By Roxanna Pacheco



TAMPA CATHOLIC BASEBALL PLAYER NICK WILLIAMS (LEFT) AND DOMINICK ESTREMEIRA (RIGHT) INSTRUCT AND LOOK ON AS ANTHONY MASTELLA, 7-YEAR-OLD CHALLENGER LEAGUE PLAYER HITS THE BALL.

Bloomington Little League recently opened its four fields to help Boy Scout Owen Sarwatka earn his Eagle Scout ranking. The project paired Little League Challenger players with high school baseball athletes in a one-day baseball skills clinic appropriately called, Everyone Can Play. Challenger players, boys and girls ages 4-18 with physical and mental challenges, were grouped by age and/or skill level and assigned to an athlete and a field. The day was spent practicing, hitting, throwing, catching and fielding.

Sarwatka, 16, a sophomore and baseball player at Tampa Catholic High School is attempting to earn his Eagle Scout ranking. A fourth generation New York Yankees fan, Sarwatka got the idea after watching a clip of a Challenger League playing with major league baseball players. When George Steinbrenner, owner of the Yankees, died, Sarwatka knew his project could honor his hero and his community. As he wrote on the Everyone Can Play Website, "I knew at that moment that my project needed to be about baseball, celebrate the kids in my community and pay tribute to a man who gave so freely to so many."

During opening ceremonies, Sarwatka thanked the community for their support and said, "This is something I hope I can take on for the rest of my life." He reminded his fellow athletes - both high school and

Challenger League sitting together on the field: "Everybody has talents in their own way. Everybody can make a difference."

Close to 60 Tampa Catholic baseball players came to offer their time and support. Among them was Nick Williams and Jorge Romero, both sophomores, who were paired with Anthony Mastella, a 7-year-old Challenger League player of Valrico. Theresa Mastella, Anthony's mother, was impressed that, with no prior experience with special needs children, the

Tampa Catholic boys were able to connect with her son. Anthony was very willing to accept Williams' guidance, reacting right away every time Williams said, "left hand out," to prepare for a catch.

The event took seven months of planning, fundraising and promoting. Through the sale of raffle tickets and donations from family and school friends Sarwatka was able to raise enough money to provide T-shirts, water and lunch. He also recruited about 20 sponsors, including the Tampa Bay Rays.

Bloomington Little League has the largest Challenger League in district 13, which covers most of eastern Hillsborough County and includes nine other little league locations. Mike McDermott, director of the Challenger division and father of a Challenger League player, is a fan of the Boy Scouts and holds the Eagle Scout rank in high regard. When the call came to participate in the event, McDermott was enthusiastic about doing so. The goal now is to make the event an annual occasion.

For more information about the event and Sarwatka's journey visit, www.everyonecanplay.org. Bloomington Little League is currently signing up players for spring season, for more information visit, www.blfl.com.

BRANDON MEALS ON WHEELS PROGRAM DELIVERS HOT MEALS AND A SMILE

By Roxanna Pacheco



MEMBERS OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN DOVER, SPEND THEIR FRIDAY MORNINGS PREPARING FOOD TO DELIVER A HOT LUNCH MEAL TO SENIORS IN THE COMMUNITY WHO CAN NOT PREPARE OR GET FOOD FOR THEMSELVES. PICTURED ARE LOUISE HUDSON (FRONT) AND BARBARA DYKES (BACK).

Every day, more than 150 local residents are greeted with a hot lunch, a few minutes of conversation and a smile. The lunches are delivered by some of the more than 250 volunteers who make up the Brandon Meals on Wheels program. Founded in 1976, it currently has 15 area churches whose members donate time and supplies to assist those seniors who, due to illnesses or handicaps, are typically unable to leave their homes or prepare their own meals.

Area Coordinator Melody Green, a member of First Baptist Church in Dover, has been coordinator for 17 years. Green remembers starting off as a driver and what inspired her to continue her service, "I volunteered as a driver nearly 18 years ago, my father received Meals on Wheels in Tampa before he passed away. He enjoyed the meals and the chance to speak to a friendly person each day; I wanted to be that person."

Volunteers are invited to participate through their local church or by contacting Green, at which point she will assign the volunteer to a church in need of more people. Green has regular volunteer's who donate three to four days a week. How much time is committed is chosen by the volunteer. If interested in becoming a driver, a vehicle is necessary, otherwise simply arrive at the church on the set day ready to cook and package meals. Green explained, "Only new volunteers from the churches are allowed to be drivers. Many of our recipients are unable to answer the door and the meals must be carried in, only someone known to the church coordinator would be allowed

this information."

Potential recipients of meals are qualified through volunteer screeners designated to specific areas. Minna Tickner, head screener, explained how the process of qualification includes a visit to recipients' home, where questions regarding medical problems are answered and a form filled out. The form is then sent to Green to

determine status and designate a church to deliver to the home.

Tickner added, "We are doing more than 200 meals a day."


Edith Warner, of Brandon, has been a recipient since 2007 and spoke excitedly about every one of the volunteers she sees every day, exclaiming, "They are fantastic. I appreciate it so much I just want to thank them all the time. I love them all."

A \$2 per meal donation is requested from the recipients but if a recipient can't pay, Tickner explained, "We do not refuse to take them a meal." Churches are responsible for supplies, receiving donations of left-over food, like breads and pies, from Panera Bread and Publix. Apostles Lutheran picks up at Panera Bread on Lithia Pinecrest Rd. every Monday night.

President Jim McNeill is responsible for recruiting churches who receive \$500 for start-up costs.

For more information to volunteer as a church or individually, contact Green at 689-8769, Tickner at 685-7241 or Lil Foster, coordinator, at 651-1645.

The 15 churches: Apostles Lutheran, Baylife, Bell Shoals Baptist, Brandon Christian, First Baptist (both in Brandon and Dover), First Presbyterian, First United Methodist (both in Seffner and Brandon), Holy Innocents' Episcopal, Kings Avenue Baptist, Limona Village Chapel Methodist, Nativity Catholic, St. Andrews Methodist, St. Stephens Catholic and Westminster Presbyterian each deliver meals to roughly 100 to 200 people.



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