

Life In Brunswick County

A stylized illustration of a lighthouse situated on a pier. The lighthouse has a dark, conical roof and a small square window. The pier is supported by numerous vertical posts and has a railing along its edge.

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NEW HOMES & REAL ESTATE

On and Off the Field

Cape Fear Shamrocks teaches the sport of lacrosse as well as character-building life skills.

BY MELISSA SLAVEN WARREN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT MCGRAW



It's the start of high school lacrosse season for coaches Eddie Jones and Steve Philipp. While they are busy creating and running plays and managing game day and practice schedules for their Brunswick County high school players, they are also thinking about the upcoming summer season for the Cape Fear

Shamrocks. Something they've been doing for 10 years now.

Cape Fear Shamrocks is a youth travel organization that Jones and Philipp first started in 2012 as a way for local youth players, including their own sons, to get seen and recruited by colleges.

"Both Steve and I were coaching our own sons' youth lacrosse teams and thinking about their collegiate opportunities," Jones says. "We got some advice: Start a travel team and get them into tournaments. Steve found one in Hilton Head, we took two teams, and it was an incredible experience. The next thing you know, the parents are saying, 'When's the next one?' The rest is history."

Now in its 10th year as a nonprofit, Shamrocks Lacrosse operates on a mission for every player to have a competitive lacrosse experience that builds character and integrity. Parents of the players often praise the organization and their staff for the contributions they provide to their children beyond the sport.

"There is a genuine commitment to excellence in this program that exceeds most children's sports activities I have witnessed in this region," says lacrosse parent Jon David. "The value of this program goes beyond learning how to play a game. The lessons gleaned from this activity are highly translatable to building the life skills I desire to instill in my son. Coach Steve Philipp and his staff do a phenomenal job in reinforcing the message that a commitment to family and education take precedence over lacrosse."

Philipp, operations manager for the Shamrocks, agrees, saying, "For us, it's always been family, then academics, then lacrosse in that order. If a kid is struggling in school, we want him at home working on his academics. There are no exceptions."

Off the field, the organization and their teams participate in community service projects including food drives, Habitat for Humanity, Toys for Tots and First Love, to name a few.

The nonprofit, funded by donors and sponsors, offers opportunities for all players. "[Shamrocks] has never turned a child away who makes it on a team because they couldn't afford to play, and we never intend to," Philipp says.

Shamrocks Lacrosse will provide more than 30 scholarships for the summer program, which is roughly 20 percent of their players. The scholarships help families pay for travel and equipment expenses.

For the most part, lacrosse is a relatively easy game to learn, with straightforward rules. Players use the head of a lacrosse stick to carry, pass, catch and shoot a ball into the goal.

Currently, Shamrocks Lacrosse offers both summer and fall traveling teams for boys in grades 3 through 12. Teams generally play four to five tournaments per season from as far away as Delaware and south to Florida. They currently have seven teams with approximately 200 players. To date, Shamrocks teams have competed in more than 500 events in eight different states and have won national level events in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina.

The large number of players is indicative of the sport's rising popularity. The game calls for skill, athleticism and hand-eye coordination, but it's an accessible sport that doesn't





necessarily rely on a particular physical framework. And it appeals to a wide range of athletes because it's non-stop action.

"The kids are constantly playing," Jones says. "If you're in a game, you're in a game. There is no sitting around waiting for your turn at bat like in baseball. It more closely resembles basketball and soccer in terms of the momentum of the game."

Shamrocks Lacrosse has 30 coaches on staff, and all area high school and middle school coaches are involved in their program. There are three coaches assigned to every Shamrocks team, including an offensive coordinator, defensive coordinator and a goalie specialist.

"We have a diverse group of coaches, some who have played lacrosse at division one and two levels," Philipp says. "Most of our coaches coach either middle school or high school in the area. And we don't just hire coaches off the cuff. Our head coaches are what we call old, fat and gray like Eddie and me! They are seasoned. But they aren't just coaches, they're mentors. And not just for the game, but life."

Additionally, some of the organization's former players who are currently playing lacrosse in college come back and help coach in the summer. One of them is Philipp's own son, a first line midfielder senior for West Point.

"Like we always say, the lacrosse piece becomes secondary,"



Jones says. "It's the academic piece that's first. That's where [scholarship] money is."

Lacrosse isn't just a sport for young men. Shamrocks Lacrosse partners with Coastal Rays Lacrosse organization with a mission to provide a safe and fun environment for all players, coaches and families to learn and develop girls' lacrosse. They offer travel lacrosse teams for middle school and high school girls. Additionally, they host clinics and offer individual and small group coaching.

Both Jones and Philipp are encouraged by the growing popularity of lacrosse in the area. It's a sport that allows for an easy transition from other sports.

"Lacrosse correlates to a lot of different sports," Jones says. "As coaches, we encourage kids to play soccer and basketball and football, so they are playing something year-round. We want our kids to be athletes." ■

Want to know more?

For more information on Shamrocks Lacrosse, visit their website at shamrockslacrosse-nc.com or contact Jones via email at director@shamrockslacrosse-nc.com or Philipp at operations@shamrockslacrosse-nc.com.



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