



Alleghany Highlands Youth Soccer Benefits from The Alleghany Foundation

The fall season is almost over for approximately 340 youth soccer players in the Alleghany Highlands, and according to Al Mildenerger, vice chairman for the Alleghany Highlands Youth Soccer Association (AHYSA), it's been the best season yet, due in part to a grant awarded by The Alleghany Foundation for a professional coach program, soccer camps and soccer nets.



“We have seen a real improvement in our players and coaches this year,” says Mildenerger, who has coached soccer in the Highlands for more than 30 years. “Our players and coach volunteers were able to hone their skills with the help of Major League Soccer (MLS) coaching professionals, thanks to the \$13,500 grant we received from The Alleghany Foundation.”

The season started with a week-long soccer clinic for girls and boys, ages 13–18 and an eight-week coaching program for players of all ages and coach volunteers to help develop age-appropriate skills and game strategies for a sport that is rapidly growing in the region.

Mildenberger says the program also helps volunteer coaches and referees better understand and teach players age-appropriate skills. “We’re fortunate to have over 90 volunteers for our 340 participants, but many of them didn’t grow up playing the sport because youth soccer is relatively new in the U.S.”

AHYSAs brought in the MLS coaching program in 2007 with funds saved through prior years’ dues and special events. “It was important for us to make sure this program was successful and that we could show concrete results before approaching The Alleghany Foundation for 2008.

The AHYSA managed to keep costs to a minimum by setting up a strict structure for the program. “Other communities with a league of our size would bring in more coaches at 3 or 4 times the cost, but we’ve figured out a way to keep costs down,” says Mildenberger.

The program is pro-rated by age. Younger kids have less professional coaching time, with the emphasis on training volunteers to teach younger kids. Because of stiffer competition, older players get their training directly from the major league coaches.

Mildenberger believes that overall, the program brought a special energy to the game this year. “We see our kids playing better and so does the competition. If you were at the Jackson River Sports Complex on Tuesdays, Thursdays & Saturdays during the eight-week program, you could see the excitement in these kids, listening and responding to the coaches.”

Major League Soccer recruits young European coaches every year for their summer professional coaching programs.

Mildenberger says that support from The Alleghany Foundation has helped the AHYSA keep player dues to a minimum. “What’s important here is that everyone who wants to play can participate no matter their size, skill level or economic status. It’s great fun and great exercise.”

“The Alleghany Foundation is pleased to award funds for a program that not only provides fun and exercise for the area’s children but promotes good sportsmanship and the value of team commitment” says Beth Webb, the Foundation’s executive director. “In keeping with the Foundation’s mission, projects such as this improve the quality of life for the residents of the Alleghany Highlands.”

In addition to funding the coaching program, the Foundation grant provided for two soccer nets to be placed along the sidelines by the Jackson River at the Jackson River

Sports Complex. According to Mildenerger, securing the nets was an economic and safety issue for the league because they were losing balls in the river and often kids would attempt to retrieve them.

Alleghany Highlands Youth Soccer Association was formed in 2004 through a cooperative effort with Alleghany County and the cities of Covington and Clifton Forge. This cooperative effort allowed for the pooling of resources in an effort to become more competitive in the region.

Mildenerger feels that participating in the MLS coaching program is taking this league to the next level. “Even the Boutetort County soccer league noticed the improvement in our players and coaches. They recently met with the regional director of Major League Soccer to discuss bringing the coaching program in for their players next year.”

Mildenerger says they are very excited about the future of youth soccer here in the Alleghany Highlands and couldn’t be more grateful to The Alleghany Foundation for helping them get to this point.

Since its inception, the foundation has granted over \$26 million to the following 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations with the purpose of improving the quality of life in the Alleghany Highlands:

- Alleghany County
- Alleghany County Parks and Recreation
- Alleghany County Public Schools
- Alleghany County Sheriff's Office
- Alleghany County United Fire and Rescue Association
- Alleghany Health District
- Alleghany Highlands Arts & Crafts Center
- Alleghany Highlands Arts Council
- Alleghany Highlands Community Services Board
- Alleghany Highlands Economic Development Authority
- Alleghany Highlands Free Clinic
- Alleghany Highlands Genealogical Society
- Alleghany Highlands YMCA
- Alleghany Highlands Youth Soccer Association
- Alleghany Historical Society
- Alleghany Humane Society
- Alleghany Mountain Radio
- American Diabetes Association
- American Red Cross
- Appalfolks of America
- Art Museum of Western Virginia
- Bath County
- Bath County Health Department
- Bath County Historical Society
- Bear Trust International

Blue Ridge Public Television
Boiling Springs Elementary School
Boiling Springs Fire Department
C.O.P.E.
C & O Historical Society
Callaghan Elementary School PTO
Charles P. Jones Memorial Library
City of Covington
Clifton Forge Little League
Clifton Forge Main Street
Clifton Forge Nursery School
Clifton Forge Public Library
Clifton Forge Volunteer Fire Department
Covington City Schools
Covington Fire Department
Covington Rescue Squad
Dabney S. Lancaster Community College
Diabetes Education Support Group
Falling Spring Elementary School PTO
Falling Spring Fire Department
Falling Spring Rescue Squad
Jackson River Enterprises
Jackson river Technical Center
League of Older Americans
Mill Mountain Theatre
Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District
Mountain View Elementary School PTO
Rockbridge Area Community Services Board
Safehome Systems
Science Museum of Western Virginia
Scott Hill Foundation, Inc.
Sharon Elementary School PTO
Sharon Volunteer Fire Department
Shenandoah Autism Center
Southwest Virginia AHEC
Southwest Virginia Second Harvest Foodbank
Special Olympics
Total Action Against Poverty
Town of Clifton
Forge
Town of Iron Gate
West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine
Western Virginia Emergency Medical Service Council