

Youth basketball gearing up for a new season

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The Del Norte County Recreation Department has announced sign-ups for its annual youth basketball program in Crescent City.

Youth basketball is what recreation coordinator Kelsey Bozeman describes as the department's "flagship" program, attracting hundreds of local youngsters.

Bozeman said the program needs the participation of the local community to flourish. "It's really cool to just see our community come together and really be there for the kids," said Bozeman.

The program begins Jan. 4 and runs each Saturday for eight weeks. Both the practices and the games take place on the same days.

This year, they rec department has added a new program, Tiny TOTs (Teams of Tomorrow). Starting Jan. 8, it will introduce children ages 3-5 to the basics of basketball and run for four weeks, rather than eight.

"Instructors will use a variety of modified approaches and fun games to foster children's understandings of basketball," said Bozeman. "This is a true beginner-level class."

Last year, the established youth basketball program had more than 700 participants from kindergarten to sixth grade, consisting of 64 different teams.

The rec department provides its own gymnasium, as well as using ones at Crescent Elk Middle School and Foursquare Church. “The local school district steps up and really helps us out, and so does Foursquare Church. We couldn’t do our program without them,” Bozeman said.

Community volunteers – usually, parents or grandparents - coach the kindergarten through fourth-grade teams, and high school basketball players coach the fifth- and sixth-graders.

Bozeman said about 60 local businesses sponsor the basketball leagues through \$100 donations, which brings the participation fee for the players down to \$30 dollars, including the uniforms. At the same time, those who are unable to pay are not excluded, she said.

The largest expense is for staffing, primarily to pay those who run the gymnasiums and keep score. For the most part, those positions go to local youth – often, their first job, Bozeman said.