

Toms River's Field of Dreams

By: Pat Johnson

The Toms River Field of Dreams playground opened this summer to provide physical and social activities to people of all ages with special needs. The complex was the dream of Christian Kane, a father with a special needs son. Thanks to his vision, financial support by RWJ Barnabas Health, various fund raising events, and a GoFundMe account on the internet; children and adults can participate and enjoy traditional activities such as baseball, basketball, bocce, and miniature golf. The 3.5 acre park located within the Bey Lea Park in Toms River, also has an all-inclusive playground, a hard surface walking path lined with murals by local artists, five community gardens, a pavilion with charging stations for electric wheelchairs, two stations for physical therapy and a quiet corner for those sensitive to noise. Eight bathrooms with six-special needs stalls and two changing tables are provided to meet family needs.



Field of Dreams in Toms River.
Photo Credit: O.C.E.A.N. Inc.

The park gate is locked to minimize vandalism and people must register to be able to enter the park. The registration and use of the park is free to members. Register at:

rwjbhfieldofdreams.com

The mission statement sums it up, "This inclusive complex intentionally addresses the physical and social inclusion of people of all ages and abilities."

Besides meeting the needs of an often-overlooked population, this wonderful park also provides work opportunity for the O.C.E.A.N. Inc. summer team of employees. O.C.E.A.N. Inc. is a nonprofit dedicated to helping low and moderate income Ocean County residents.



Field of Dreams Mini-Golf Area.
Photo Credit: O.C.E.A.N. Inc.

The O.C.E.A.N. Inc. Summer Employment Program participants contribute to the welfare of the members by sanitizing and cleaning the playground and weeding and watering the gardens. Earlier this year, they also laid the stones for the mini golf course, built storage units, painted, and stained wooden posts to prepare the park for opening. They continue to provide general upkeep tasks.

Continued on page 15

People 18 years and older can apply every summer through the O.C.E.A.N. Inc. website (oceaninc.org) or Facebook page. Supervisor of the employment program Maureen Nooner said 25 Ocean County residents and between 12 to 15 Atlantic and Cape May residents took advantage of the summer employment that started in May and ended August 12. Through a partnership, the workers completed various projects in the three counties including painting and cleaning low- income housing. They also learned computer and phone skills. And just because summer ended, that doesn't mean they are left out in the cold. O.C.E.A.N. Inc. will hire some full time, others are going on to college or VoTec programs. "They have learned some nice skills, things they can put on a resume," said Nooner. "It's a great program."



The team prepare the O.C.E.A.N. Inc. building in Atlantic City for a mural.

Photo Credit: O.C.E.A.N. Inc.