

Draft group formed to adopt land for ballfield

'Diamond club' will develop county-owned plot behind firehouse

By MARK TONER
Staff Writer

STUARTS DRAFT — When looking for someone to adopt a run-down plot of land and convert it into a needed ballfield, this community reached back to its roots.

After Augusta County warned that a vacant plot of land it owns behind the Stuarts Draft Firehouse might be put on the auction block if a group interested in developing a ballfield there didn't surface, about half a dozen Draft residents have stepped forward to help in the last few weeks.

The group, which is in the early stages of organizing a "diamond club" that would build and oversee a ballfield large enough for 16- 18-year-olds on the county-owned land, is no stranger to the community.

"These are guys who have been working on the Little League program since when I was growing up," said Orvin H. Kiser Jr., chairman and South River representative to the county's Parks and Recreation Commission. "They're being called back into service."

Kiser would know. One of the people spearheading the effort to revitalize the field is his father, Orvin H. Kiser Sr.

Like his son, the elder Kiser was once the head of the parks and rec commission, and was frustrated in his attempts to improve the area's recreational facilities by a lack of money.

As a result, when the possibility that the county-owned land might be sold off became real, Kiser jumped.

"I was afraid that the county might sell that property," he said. "To me, that would have been a catastrophe."

Kiser says he wants to see the field behind the firehouse, which has fallen into disrepair in recent years, put to good use.

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So far, a wide spectrum of people from the South River area, ranging from high school students and coaches to retirees, have gotten on the bandwagon, Kiser said. And each has brought talents that will make building the ballfield easier, he said.

For example, Dave Branch is expected to help with plumbing needs, while Randall Houff will assist with the irrigation and engineering of the field, Kiser said. Developer Ed Cooper will represent the area's businesses, while Jack Crummett Jr. will represent the area's Babe Ruth League and Phillip Doyle will represent the Sherando area. Other participants so far include Virginia Michael and Michael Link, a sophomore at Stuarts Draft High

School.

"I tried to get as much of a cross-section of the community as I could," Kiser said.

But Kiser is reluctant to speak for the group as a whole, saying that a public meeting will have to be held and officers elected before the diamond club can formally approach the county Board of Supervisors about leasing the land.

"We're still in the early planning stages," he said.

South River Supervisor John Swett said last month that the county would help such a group legally incorporate and also donate leftover fill dirt from a drainage project under way in Draft's downtown area for the ballfield's construction.

The diamond club isn't the only group that's working on recreation needs in the Stuarts Draft area, however.

Another community-based group, the Light Up the Draft committee, has begun planning for renovations to the high school's field and is studying ways to raise money to buy lights for that field, and a South River advisory committee to the county's parks and rec commission is expected to meet again in mid-September.