

With the crisp cool air creeping in, it's a signal that it's time for us to start our focus on fall programs and projects. Fall soccer is underway, with the kickoff for the U4-U8 levels starting on September 12. Once again, Challenger Sports will be assisting our volunteer coaches with these levels. The Ayer-Shirley travel soccer levels (U-10 through High School) are also underway and will continue their season through the beginning of November. Let's hope it continues to be a warm autumn! Commissioner Sarah Gibbons will be working with the Ayer Youth Soccer Board to oversee the U4-U8 program, while a joint Ayer-Shirley Board will oversee the travel levels.

It's also time to start registering for the AYB and ASYB Basketball programs, which will start in the late fall. There are programs for all ages and abilities starting as young as preschool and extending to 8th grade. Last year the basketball program had over 300 participants! With so much interest, gym space is always a concern, but we hope to be able to work with the school to make sure we are able to have enough court time to continue providing an affordable high quality program. Forms for all programs run through the Parks Department can be found on the town website or outside the Parks Department office.

The newly formed YO! program has been able to put together a few events for the upcoming fall months. These include some local hikes and even a campout at Pirone Park! For those unfamiliar with YO! (Youth Outdoors), it is an event based program designed to promote outdoor activities for local kids and families. We hope to schedule a few more events to finish up the year, then schedule a wider variety of activities for next spring and summer. If you have any ideas, they are always welcome.

Sandy Pond Beach closed the swim season on September 7. The park remains open for picnics, basketball, volleyball, or just enjoying the waterfront. We will reopen for swimming on Memorial Day weekend next spring. The Parks Commission is reviewing the policy for residential and non-residential use for the upcoming 2016 season. Due to funds accepted through a grant that were used for the park's improvements in 2005, the Town of Ayer is limited in how restrictive it can be in determining residential and non-residential usage of the waterfront area. The Commission will continue investigating its options and seek out public opinion on the matter.

As for recent projects, we have started putting on a new roof at our maintenance building at Pirone Park, and will need to do a few more improvements on the aging building to keep it updated. The Parks Department is working with Mark Wetzel of the DPW to plan for the construction of a new maintenance building to provide storage space that has been in great need since the loss of the old Firehouse. We have also been clearing more brush along the peripheral boundaries of the park, with the assistance of court order volunteers from the Middlesex Probation Office. The area cleared last fall on the east end of Pirone has been enhanced with two Eagle Scout projects, one by Jason Langlais and the other by Jeff Blood. Jason has created a picnic area complete with tables, benches and even a fire pit (permission required for use). Jeff has built a fence along the waterfront to give the area some containment and also prevent waterfowl from coming ashore and leaving "deposits" in the adjacent soccer field. Thanks to both of you for your efforts!

Jeff Thomas
Ayer Parks Department