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THE BOCCIE CLUB OF GREATER NEW ORLEANS INVITES YOU TO JOIN THEIR RANKS!

Posted by: Meghan Jones in N.O. Happenings on Sep 17, 2009 
 Tagged in: italy , italian sports , italian club , bocce club of greater new orleans , bocce , bob agnelly

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"So you start with the little ball called the pollino," Bob Agnelly carefully explained to me, holding something a bit larger than a ping pong ball in his hand, "and you roll it out on the court. Then you try to get as close as you can to it with the other balls."

Agnelly, one of the charter members of the Bocce Club of Greater New Orleans, is trying to teach me how to play bocce ball. Emphasis on *trying*, of course, because sports have really never been my forte. But I'm learning.

It's a rainy, gloomy day outside, but from the inside of the Bocce Club clubhouse, you'd never know you weren't in Italy. One member built a wall that looks like a pretty Italian balcony, complete with a miniature painting of the hands of God and Adam from the Sistene Chapel, and a few others painted the wall facing

the courts with a scene from a seaside Italian town. As Agnelly says, "The sun's always shining in the bocce club!"

Before last Friday, I'd had no idea that New Orleans even had a bocce club, but it definitely makes sense: The sport is rapidly gaining popularity in cities all over the country.

"In St. Louis," Agnelly said, "they have over 500 members in their bocce club. The club is in an area called The Hill, which is an old Italian community. They have corporate leagues, regular membership leagues, daytime leagues for women, all types of events... but you can do that when you have 500 people."

Currently boasting about 40 active members, our bocce club is a bit smaller.

"We've been fighting the membership battle for a long time, but it's been tougher since Katrina," Agnelly said. "We had over 70 paid members when Katrina hit, and we lost at least 40, just people who lost their homes and moved to Houston and other places."

This fall, though, the Bocce Club of Greater New Orleans is getting serious about member recruitment. Tonight, September 17, they're doing drawings for the upcoming fall league. If you're interested, the kind folks at the bocce club will let you play the first league for the small price of \$35 without actually joining the club, just to see if you like it.



Not sure you want to sign up for a whole 13-week league? Never played bocce before in your whole life? Well, you're in luck! Next Tuesday, September 22, the bocce club will be hosting an open house at 7 p.m. There will be free beer until it runs out, members around to chat with and open bocce courts to test those skills of yours. Just don't be surprised if you get hooked; it happened to Agnelly.

"We were at a picnic and they had bocce games at the picnic," Agnelly reminisced of his first bocce experience, back in the mid-80's. "I'd never played bocce before, and they set up a little court out there in City Park, and I was just rolling bocce balls around and I got out there and I kind of liked it. Then I started checking around and found out that they had some other people that were interested in bocce."

The Bocce Club already had some courts set up in City Park, but because of the hot sun, no one ever played on them. Shortly after Agnelly joined, they built their first clubhouse on Palmyra Street, where they stayed until "the neighborhood got so bad, our members didn't feel safe walking to their cars." That's when they moved to their current location on Severn, just south of the I-10 Service Road.

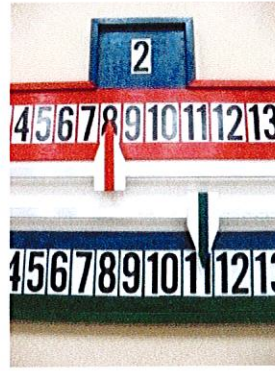
Today, the club is largely comprised of people with an Italian heritage, but the treasurer is Irish, and, as Agnelly said, anybody who plays bocce is welcome in the bocce club.

"Bocce is played all over the world," he explained. "15 million Chinese play bocce; they teach bocce in school there and they always send a team to the world championships every year. One of the best teams in the world is from Brazil. I just came back from Venice, and there are three bocce clubs in Venice, each with its own private membership. Most people that live there are in bocce clubs."

Membership to our bocce club is just \$150 a year, and they're open every Wednesday and Thursday nights so members can play bocce, enjoy a beer at the bar or speak Italian with other players. There are free games and games

where the players put up \$5 each, "just to make it a little more interesting." After all, I hear that's how the Venetians do it.

The Bocce Club of Greater New Orleans is located at 2340 Severn Avenue in Metairie. Call Bob Agnelly at 504-722-4631 for more information.



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written by *****, September 17, 2009
I've always wanted to give Bocce a try. I think I'll be there on the 22nd!



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