

Senior Boosters: One Guilford Generation Cheers on Another

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By [Pam Johnson](#) Courier Senior Staff Writer

Tod Hart knows the value of Friendly Visiting and now he's found a way to bridge the generation gap that can't be beat: matching senior citizen "fans" to local youth sports teams.

The Guilford resident and father of two served on the board of the Guilford Basketball League for the past five years and still officiates recreation league basketball games. Last year, Hart joined the Guilford Interfaith Ministries (GIM) Board and that's where he learned about Friendly Visiting. It matches volunteers to senior citizens who benefit greatly from some periodic companionship and contact.

"As I began to understand the needs of this population of our town, I began to think about how we might mesh our youth sports organizations with our senior population," explained Hart.

Hart came up with the concept of Senior Boosters, placing interested seniors on a youth team in a sport that senior would love to follow. Kids on the teams would recognize their seniors before or after each game; boosters would get a team jersey and team schedule to encourage them to be a part of the action.

This past basketball season, two Sachem's Hollow residents, both big UConn Husky women's basketball fans, signed on to give the concept a test run. By the end of the season, the team of two senior female fans had grown to four.

The experiment cultivated winning results, says Friendly Visiting Coordinator Lori Wells.

"The girl's basketball team won a tournament and they gave a trophy to the women as honorary team members. They cannot wait to resume attending their games next year," said Wells.

Recently, Hart talked about GIM's first foray into Senior Boosters with members of the town's Little League teams, with which he would like to expand Senior Boosters. Five seniors are already signed up for a Little League team. Hart said he would like to expand the concept to all youth sports programs.

"We are one town with a diverse population. Young and old and those in between. Quite often, the elderly have little to do and not much to look forward to. Many don't have a local family and have little connection anymore to the vibrant lifestyle we enjoy in Guilford. I also feel that, in many cases, the elderly are somewhat misunderstood by our youth," Hart said.

Thanks to Hart's effort, Wells said, "Friendly Visiting is matching Guilford seniors with youth sports teams in hopes of bridging the gap between these two populations."

To become involved with the Senior Boosters program, contact GIM Friendly Visiting at 203-453-8359.