

Word Count 1188

## **City of Belleview's Employee of the Year for 2008**

The person who defines our City's motto of what a "City with Small Town Charm" should be, and is, Fred King. The employees of Belleview honored their peer, Fred King, with the Employee of the Year Award at its annual Employee Awards Banquet in April 2008. Because he continues to find ways to make Belleview a better City to live in, this employee nomination was further endorsed by the Commission later in year to be submitted for the Florida League of Cities Employee of the Year Award.

Fred has always been involved in the lives of children and his unofficial middle name is SPORTS. During his career he has coached sports for 60 years; 32 of those in Marion County, Florida. Mr. King has committed himself to our community, first by working as a volunteer to fix up our sports complex, and eventually, he came out of retirement the City's part-time Recreation Coordinator. Even in his part-time capacity he made an impression on all, most particularly those who hired him. Former Commissioner Emery Abshier stated in a public meeting that "The City hired Fred King as the Sports Director and for the first time the Sports Complex was running better than it ever had."

He not only cares about the job that he does, he truly cares about the children and people of the City of Belleview. He is always working on a project that in some way will have a positive impact on the citizens of Belleview. The work that he has done at the ballpark, to make the baseball fields the envy of other organizations, has been great. At

times when the City could not divert any more funds to the park, Fred knew how to get donations from builders and businesses in the area to further his desire to give children a safe, clean and well maintained place to play and grow-up. At his urging, local businesses have donated \$6,377.00 for our Sports Complex mower; Florida Power Company charged only \$1,000 for lights at the boy's field when initially the price was \$8,000; \$2,500 was donated for a shed at the Sports complex for tools and supplies; \$10,000 was donated for John Deere Tractor for dragging fields and hauling dirt and clay; \$36,000 was donated to overhaul the bathrooms for the soccer fields; \$6,000 was donated for a new roof to replace the leaking roof on the old concession stand; \$35,000 was donated for concrete for the bathroom floors and slabs for bleachers and dugouts; and the list goes on and on. At last count, he is responsible for over \$200,000 of donations.

Watching children play and having fun is near and dear to his heart. As a result, he was determined that children who had limited access to playgrounds would have one. Out of that vision, coupled with his connections to a Home Depot executive from the area that he had coached as a child, the City received a playground in an area that there was none. Bill McLain, Home Depot's Security Director, who was the Home Depot executive formerly coached by Fred, arranged for the best playground to be built for his friend and former coach.

The grant from Home Depot and KaBOOM! Transformed an empty lot into an enchanting playground of major proportions. KaBOOM! is a national nonprofit

organization that envisions a great place to play within walking distance of every child in America. KaBOOM! gives strong consideration to low-income areas, particularly those with a high number of children on free or reduced lunches, in selecting playground sites. To the City's surprise, our grant which was supposed to build a \$50,000 playground turned into a \$100,000 playground. A spherical play system was designed so that children have to use their imagination to figure out how to play on it. Only a child would not be intimidated as they figure out how to get around on it. The children of the community were further involved when they were invited and came to help design the look of the playground. The colors they picked were the University of Florida Gator colors – blue and orange. The project instantly connected with the community on Build Day in February of this year. Hundreds of volunteers from area Home Depots, KaBOOM!, City employees and citizens from the young to the young at heart, from the business leaders to the stay at home moms helped to erect the playground. Thanks to this community effort, the playground was built in one day. This is just one example of his dedication to make life better for the children of Belleview. This project would not have been possible without Fred King's passion to make time for the children he considers not only vulnerable but precious.

The City Commission surprised Fred when they decided to name the playground the "Fred King Playground" to honor his efforts in this project. As the City operates in the sunshine, the decision had to be made at a public meeting. The biggest surprise of all was that it was kept a secret until the playground's grand opening. This humble man was

truly surprised and honored to see his name on the park next to the Home Depot and KaBOOM!'s plaque.

Mr. King's personal motto is "A man stands tallest when he kneels to help a child." Mr. King is currently working on a recreation center so all children can have a safe place to go after school and be mentored. It breaks his heart to think that there is even a need, but because there is that need, he is committed to find a way to fulfill it. He has always been proactive when it comes to children, and has a genuine desire to improve the quality of life for each child. As he sees it that is best done through some kind of sport's event or activity be it the toddler on a swing or a high school child batting or throwing a pass, or a preteen manipulating soccer ball for a goal. The age or sex of a child does not matter to him; he just wants to get that child out there to play.

Mr. King's vision, drive and determination have been an inspiration to many in the City and the area. That is why this former World War II veteran continues to beg, plead and massage influential business people, officials and anyone who would listen to help his favorite cause – the children. Fred never runs out of projects that he wants to do, just go to the ballpark and talk to him. He will tell you about his dreams for the basketball court project, or his desire to have a community center or a host of other ideas that he has – and the common link that all his ideas have are to enhance the lives of the children of Belleview. Sounds like he is dreaming beyond the means of this small community, but those of us who work with him know that somehow Fred King's dreams seem to come true more often than not.