

Englewood Senior Softball ramps up, goes year-round

By RUDY DAVIS

ENGLEWOOD SENIOR SOFTBALL

The Lightning are aiming for three in a row, the Bucs are on path to repeat, and here in Englewood, New Faull Inn and Xpertech Auto Service aim to win back to back respective championships as the Englewood Senior Softball League moves from the fall season to the upcoming winter season.

Following successful completion of the 2021 winter season, the league held 6- to 8-week seasons in spring, summer and fall — with the fall season currently underway and the summer season held for the first time.

"We are now a year-round league, with over 100 players in each of the spring, summer and fall seasons," said Burt Rood, a manager in the Gold division. "The interest in this league is just phenomenal."

Attention is now shifting to the upcoming winter season, with open practices for interested players underway each weekday from 8 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. on the adult softball fields at the Englewood Sports Complex, 1300 River Road.

New players are welcome. Anyone who is age eligible — turning 60 or older in 2022 — and interested in playing



PHOTO PROVIDED

David Vaught, left, is joined by his son Mike Vaught in the Englewood Senior Softball League in this 2021 photo.

"simply needs to show up with a glove and a desire to play," per John Anjos, manager of the Ben's Barbershop team in the silver division. "Bats are available and all are welcomed."

The typical new player is one who hasn't played in some time, and has recently moved to the area, though many new players have played in summer leagues "up north." The practice sessions, which run through the end of December, gives players a chance to refresh their skills, and prepare for the upcoming draft.

"The skill level ranges from first timers to more-advanced

players, with one common goal ... get some exercise, make new friends and have fun," said Anjos.

The league was established in 1992, which makes this coming year the 30th anniversary, a true milestone. The league attracts players from Englewood, North Port, Venice, Rotonda, Boca Grande and Port Charlotte and had more than 250 players in the winter season last year.

"The league's mission is to create an opportunity for men over 60 to play recreational softball," said Mark Johnson, League Commissioner. "With

the expanding population in the Suncoast area, we've also seen a record turnout for the three 'off' seasons."

The league anticipates that additional teams may be added this year, reflecting the leagues focus on recruiting more players.

The league's recruitment efforts continue to pay off, with a record draft reported for last year's winter season, and the growing numbers in the spring, summer and fall seasons.

The league anticipates that the bronze division, which is very popular for those nearing or over 80 years of age, will expand from two teams to three or four, and the gold and silver divisions may expand to nine teams from eight to accommodate more players.

The league has three divisions, the bronze division, the silver division, for players who have slowed a bit or are not drafted in the gold division, and the gold division for players with higher level skills. Divisional alignment is based primarily on skill level. This creates a safer playing environment by putting players of equivalent skill together.

There's a draft winter season the first week January to fill out the teams. The teams play a 21-game schedule, plus an end-of-season tournament. This

year's draft is planned for Jan. 5 for the Gold division, Jan. 6 for both Silver and Bronze, with advanced registration required. Prospective players can sign up at www.englewoodseniorsoftball.weebly.com.

Spring, summer and fall leagues, still in their early years, do not yet have a formal draft, and teams are formed to create similar levels of talent so as to keep the games competitive.

The league is supported by local businesses that sponsor the teams, and the list is growing.

"We are very grateful, and loyal, to our sponsors. It helps to supply teams with jerseys, equipment and the cost of renting the fields from the county," says Johnson. And the nearly 300 players and their fans frequent those businesses all year long. "It's a symbiotic relationship, for sure."

For more information about the league, visit the website. Registration for the winter season draft is required and can be done by filling out a registration form available at the Englewood Sports Complex, or by downloading the form from the league's website. If you own a business and would like to be a sponsor, contact Mark Johnson at 717-982-8456.