

# March Madness in Key Largo

## Local Basketball Program Thrives

by Susan Bohan

If it's the middle of March, it must be time for "March Madness" to take hold of sports fans. Even if you never played the game, setting up your brackets and cheering (and possibly betting on) your favorite college teams becomes a two-week obsession for many of us.

For Mic O'Keeffe, Executive Director of Sports & Recreation, and his wife Melissa, a teacher and part-time coach of tennis and pickleball at Ocean Reef, the sport of basketball goes well beyond March. Both Mic and Melissa played on the college level; he at the University of



Coaches Mic and Melissa O'Keeffe with one of the FKYBL teams.

Central Missouri, and she at Butler University. When they heard that the local community youth programs would be cancelled after the destruction wrought by Hurricane Irma, they jumped into action. The O'Keeffes organized the Florida Keys Youth Basketball League for boys and girls from first through eighth grade (ages 6 – 14) and made it FUN! They scheduled Evaluation Play over two days at the end of October then had "Draft Day" to ensure that the 22 teams divided into

three divisions by age were fairly even in talent. Since all participants are guaranteed playing time, they felt that was only fair.

The Ocean Reef Community Foundation learned of their efforts and became Title Sponsor, allowing for an increase in all aspects of the basketball program. They now have professional referees at each game. All coaches are volunteers but now wear collared shirts with the Florida Keys Youth Basketball League (FKYBL) logo and enjoy the added respect that it brings. Every child has a team uniform, there is adequate equipment for every game, and they enable the entrance fee for participation to be halved to \$75 per year and even provide scholarships if the fee presents a hardship.

The season began in November and just ended in February with the presentation of Awards. They provide clinics on Sundays and during the Christmas holidays. Now numbering 250 boys and girls, all the work started by the O'Keeffes has a major payoff for the local kids: "They are learning teamwork and how to work with others. Whether shy or arrogant when they come to us, they gradually become more cooperative," remarks Mic. "As a teacher, I know it is important to expose each player to other kids outside their neighborhood and school. From the music we play before each game to the professional look of the volunteers, we are teaching life lessons and creating memorable experiences. The increase in



Makayla Hann won the Dr. Tom O'Keeffe Citizenship Award in her division.



Abigail Leigh, with her parents, was one of three recipients of the "Dr. Tom O'Keeffe Citizenship Award." This award is named for Mic O'Keeffe's father, who he credits for instilling his love of the game of basketball, coupled with strong teamwork and positive attitude.

parental support only adds to the overall great experience for each child," adds Melissa.

So while you enjoy the excitement of "March Madness" and the emergence of an inevitable "Cinderella" team that destroys your bracket, it is nice to know that Ocean Reef supports the passion of two of our own to make some child's dreams a little more fulfilled!

*Heading Off!  
Happy St. Patrick's Day!*





Michael Hoffman  
24" x 36" Unframed  
Acrylic on Canvas



Mark Edwards  
Jewelry 30% Off

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### KAPPA ALPHA THETA GET TOGETHER

All Kappa Alpha Thetas are invited to a gathering at the Reef Lounge, **Thursday, March 26 at 5 p.m.** For details, contact **Kay Fischer** at 301-351-1605.