



## Adults getting a kick out of this 'kids game' !

As twilight descended upon Chapel Hill's Homestead Park athletic fields last Thursday night, crowds of young men and women seemed to reluctant to leave. Pooled into teams clad in bright and sometimes whimsically thematic athletic attire, the athletes left the fields kicking and screaming.

... And celebrating, and shouting, and kicking, and laughing.

Oh, and still kicking.

Such is the lighthearted and easy social scene that surrounds one of the fastest growing recreational leagues in the area — the North Carolina-Triangle kickball league.

The local edition of the World Adult Kickball Association is owned and operated by Cindy Honickman, just the third franchisee of a WAKA league and the first female owner / operator in the nationwide organization launched last year.

"It's nostalgic. When they hear about it, people ask, 'They do that? I haven't played that since the fourth grade'," Honickman said. "A 9 to 5 job can be pretty boring, and for me, playing kickball was the highlight of my week."

WAKA's Triangle League comprises teams from Durham, Orange and Chatham Counties, with players 21-years old or older. Games are played on Thursday evenings at Chapel Hill's Homestead Park Field No. 2.

Though teams are set, some spots remain open for the spring season, Honickman said. Another season will begin in June.

"We have some players that have been playing for eight seasons (but) 65 percent of this season's players are brand new," Honickman said.

"We're now up to 163 players; just last week we were only at 136," she said. "We don't have a ton of spaces left, but we'll leave registration open until this Friday (April 6)."

Those still interested in playing this spring should visit the league website at "<http://www.kickball.com/nctriangle>" or contact Honickman by email at [cindy@kickball.com](mailto:cindy@kickball.com).

Current league teams include Three Birds, Alcoballics Unanimous, BALLasted, the Blue Ballers, the Dirty Durhamites, the Hebrew Hammers, Inglorious baLLstars, Smooth Criminals, Sports Endeavors, and the Crush.

***The popularity of the NC-Triangle kickball league mirrors the growth of WAKA nationwide. Currently, WAKA boasts 80,000 players in 35 states.***

***WAKA was founded in 1998 by a group of friends in Washington D.C. to provide and promote the joy of kickball to those young at heart, according to [www.kickball.com](http://www.kickball.com).***



Mark McCrew serves up a pitch during WAKA play last week at Homestead Park.

# Adult Kickball !



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While interest in kickball most certainly rides the wave of adult interest in so-called "retro" playground recreation including adult team dodgeball and even whiffleball leagues, most enthusiasts and organizers agree that the biggest appeal is social.

Looking at the interaction of players both on the teams and surrounding the fields of play, it almost seems as if someone threw a large, well-attended party and, somewhere along the line, a kickball game broke out.

It's easy to make friends in college; you just knock on someone's door," Honickman said. "But when you're 22, 23, or 24, it's not that easy to meet people. ...

"It's where I met most of my friends when I was living in Tampa (Fla.) WAKA actually has so many stories of business partners, wives, and friends, all who all of a sudden had a social life.

"The best part is the friendships," said Mary Grace Miller of the Smooth Criminals squad, who joined with her husband. "We found out about this online."

"I think it's about the social aspects," said Lily Gilchrist of the BALLasted team, many of whom were UNC Dentistry School students. "The league brings a lot of different aspects of Chapel Hill together. It's not just businesses, and it's not just students."

"I did this myself last semester too, and it's now much bigger than last fall," said Gunther Heyder, the BALLasters' team captain. "It's a great place for some exercise and the social aspects."

Honickman said the BALLasters chose different uniform themes every single week, and the league chose theme nights across teams as well.

"One night it's cowboys and Indians, and the next week it's maybe day-glo (colors) or a toga party theme," she said.

Honickman said that, while games were played on diamonds, the leagues social scene extended well beyond the athletic fields.

"Our sponsors are Kildaire's Irish Pub on Franklin Street, and they've been awesome," she said. "They've planned all kinds of events, trivia nights, and things like that.



WAKA players pretty much agree universally that socializing after the games is as important, if not more important, than the final score.



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"I've also been planning some events with the Raleigh League, and they've invited us to a Carolina Hurricanes game, and I'm planning a WAKA event at a Durham Bulls game. We'll also have a tournament to benefit the Duke Cancer Center in September."

Given the surge in local popularity, Honickman has high hopes for expansion throughout the western Triangle.

"This summer, we'll be having this same league on Thursday nights in Chapel Hill and also a Sunday afternoon league at Anderson Park in Carrboro," she said. "This fall we'll have field in Durham which will probably be near Southpoint, because some of the Research Triangle people will be able to get to it more easily along with maybe some Duke players. Then we'll have Durham, Chapel Hill, and if it works out, also a Carrboro league."

"Once we get around 200 players in this league we'll look at starting another Tuesday night league, otherwise it's a lot on one field," Honickman added.

After months of planning out everything in detail, Honickman said it was particularly gratifying to see the league officially start.

"It's one thing to be working on it at home on my computer," she said on Thursday, "but then to come out here, it becomes real when you actually see the people instead of just lists of names."

With the spring season underway, and summer registration yet to come, perhaps it's Honickman's turn to "kick" back for a while.

**Editor's Note:** Adult Kickball Leagues have grown nationwide by over 2,500% in the last four [4] years. Another strictly Adult Recreational Sport that is really catching on !

## Adult Kickball !

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"The league brings a lot of different aspects of Chapel Hill together. It's not just businesses, and it's not just students," says Lily Gilchrist of the BALLasted team, who, by the way, is out at first.