

Three of Folsom's greatest attributes are its appeal as a place to live, work and play. For that third part—the playing—we can thank the Folsom Athletic Association (FAA).

Created in 1979, FAA was the brainchild of pharmacist George Econome, who saw how an explosion in the popularity of adult softball programs was pushing kids out of the limited number of sports fields in the city. Back then, there was a field at City Park and a few at local schools, but that was it—Folsom didn't even have a parks and recreation department. "The FAA came together to advocate for better recreational programs and more facilities for residents," says Folsom Vice Mayor Ernie Sheldon, who's been FAA's executive director since 1988. "Our primary emphasis, then and now, is to give our youth every opportunity to participate in sports and recreation."

FAA's first major success was the 30-acre Lembi Park, named after an employee of the Natoma Land Corporation who arranged for the company to donate all the land. More milestones followed, including the Folsom Aquatic Center, the CAVE Teen Centers, the Folsom Sports Complex, a full suite of organized sports programs and, the jewel of Folsom, the bike trails. Success like that doesn't just happen overnight—it's the result of a dedicated effort to bring all parties together to work for common solutions (such as multi-use facilities), instead of trying to protect individual interests.

Having the facilities and programs in place is nice, but if families can't afford to have their kids involved in them, the job isn't getting done. That's why in 1987 FAA launched a scholarship program, which has now helped more than 3,000 kids cover costs associated with participation. "Our motto is 'Never in our town will a child be deprived of recreational opportunities due to financial conditions,'" Sheldon says. "What would you rather have, a kid

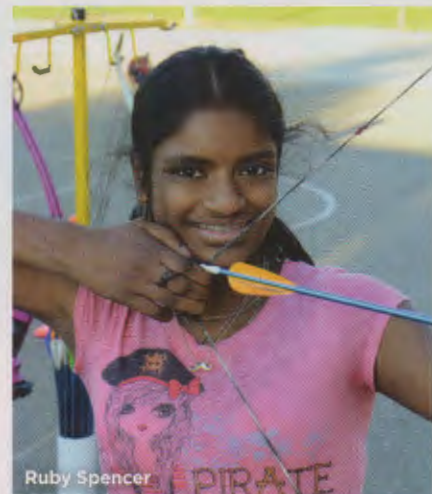
recreation rules

Folsom Athletic Association

by Bill Romanelli



Archery Skills Class at Folsom Sports Complex



Ruby Spencer



Brady Bateson

on a sports field or a kid on a street corner?" Indeed, the benefits kids get from being involved in organized after-school activities, sports included, are well-documented: Higher grades, less trouble with the law, and fewer problems with drugs and alcohol are among the most important, along with the skills and abilities they learn in the areas of teamwork and goal achievement.

Looking ahead, FAA is focused on Folsom's growth south of Highway 50 and what that means for the city's current facilities and programs. What's in place today is already close to capacity, and it's clear the city can't just absorb the needs of another 23,000 people.

"People ask two questions when they think about moving to a community. One, how are the schools? And two, are there good sports programs for kids?" Sheldon says. "We have great answers to both, but as Folsom grows we need to expand programs and build new facilities to meet future needs." •

Visit folsomathleticassociation.com for more information.