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LITTLE HAITI

## New Optimist Club in Little Haiti is off to running start

The Little Haiti Optimist Club produced a TV show and started a youth football league -- coached by a real NFL player -- in its first summer.

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While some teens spend their free time playing video games or surfing the Web, an Optimist Club in Little Haiti spent this year producing a television show and creating the first football team in the neighborhood.

The Little Haiti Optimist Club has been around for less than a year, but this summer they edited, produced, then premiered their own television show as part of the Reel Opportunities Film and video program, a program club President Marie Louissaint designed to teach kids about film-making.

"It took a lot of dedication from many to make the Reel2Real TV Show project happen," Louissaint said. "The instructors were not paid. They were very committed to the kids and teaching them about concept development, script writing, producing segments, camera work and editing."

Twenty-five teens from the club produced a 30-minute segment where members interviewed a wide range of celebrities from Stephen Hill, president of music programming at BET, to local artists such as popular rappers Rick Ross and Trina.

The show included historical facts about the Freedom Tower which serves as a memorial to Cuban immigration to the United States, and Virginia Key Beach, which was once the only beach in Miami-Dade County open to African Americans.

"For the historical segment about Virginia Key Beach, they went to the beach and some of the kids had never been to the beach, if you can believe that," Louissaint said.

Wills Felin, an independent television producer, helped train the students during the filming of the program.

"It was an entertainment magazine show," said Felin, a University of Miami graduate, "and just like any other magazine, you have to have entertainment and pertinent information as well."

The Reel program served for teens ages 13-17. But younger kids in the program had something else to look forward to this year: making history.

The club's pee wee football team, The Little Haiti Patriots, is the first football team to ever represent the community.

Charles Joseph, the team's head coach who also plays offensive tackle for the Jacksonville Jaguars, said he has been waiting since childhood for a chance to get involved in a program like the Little Haiti Optimist Club.

“When I was growing up I always wanted to play for a pee wee football team, but couldn't because I weighed too much and because there were no local ones,” said Joseph, who currently weighs a whopping 342. “I always told myself: ‘Someone's going to start something and I'm going to be involved in it.’” Joseph, who grew up in Little Haiti, spoke of the negative stereotypes that plague the neighborhood.

“People say that Little Haiti is a war zone, but this is something positive for us,” he said.

Louissaint said she would like to repeat the Reel program next summer and plans to pitch the show to several networks.

“We will be pitching the show to outlets who might be interested in airing it as well as pitching it at the National Association of Television Program Executives in January 2011.”

Louissaint said in order to make this happen the club needs funding but said she “feels blessed” because of a donation from Grammy Award-winning R&B artist Ne-Yo, who donated \$10,000 to the club in May.

“He is the largest cash contributor of Little Haiti Optimist Club programs and activities as well as a honorary board member,” Louissaint said. “Because of Ne-Yo's generous contribution as well as other supporters and partners, we have been able to present all of our programs and activities since we became a club in April.”

For more info, call 305-390-0234 or go to [www.littlehaitioptimistclub.org](http://www.littlehaitioptimistclub.org).

Read more: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2010/10/11/1868728/new-optimist-club-in-littel-haiti.html#ixzz12FmbmEtO>