

SOUTHERNMOST BOCCE LEAGUE, INC.

The Southernmost Bocce League, Inc. was formed in 1991 as a Florida nonprofit corporation with its mission to “organize bocce players to play in tournaments to raise money for charities and community projects.” We now have 56 teams of over 430 players playing four nights each week. Players range in age from late teens to early eighties and include a true cross section of our community with professionals, tradesmen, grandparents and snowbirds on team rosters.

Bocce began in Key West in the mid-80’s as part of the Sons of Italy Festa held on Columbus Day at Bayview Park. The four makeshift courts set up for the Festa became somewhat permanent when a group of regular players began forming into teams. Things got a little tricky with traffic stopping on Truman Avenue to see what all the fun was about and the City of Key West worked with the group to move the courts to Indigenous Park. Initially there were five courts with play on Wednesday and Thursday nights. We now have League play Monday – Thursday nights on seven courts and several informal but regular groups use the courts during the day.

League by-laws require a donation each season (twice annually) to one of three local agencies – Wesley House Family Services, Florida Keys Children’s Shelter and MARC. In addition, the by-laws authorize League officials to donate up to 20% of each season’s revenue to causes deemed worthy by the group. Over the past ten years, we have donated over \$20,000 to local agencies and people in need. Beneficiaries include the three agencies above, Boys and Girls Club, Keys Wildlife Center, Cancer Foundation of the Florida Keys, Hospice/VNA of the Florida Keys, and Florida Keys Easter Seals.

Bocce is one of the few outdoor adult recreation activities in Key West. The League maintains the courts and purchases its own equipment, thus the impact on City services is minimal. Future plans include increasing the length of the playing courts to be able to host tournaments with teams from out of town.