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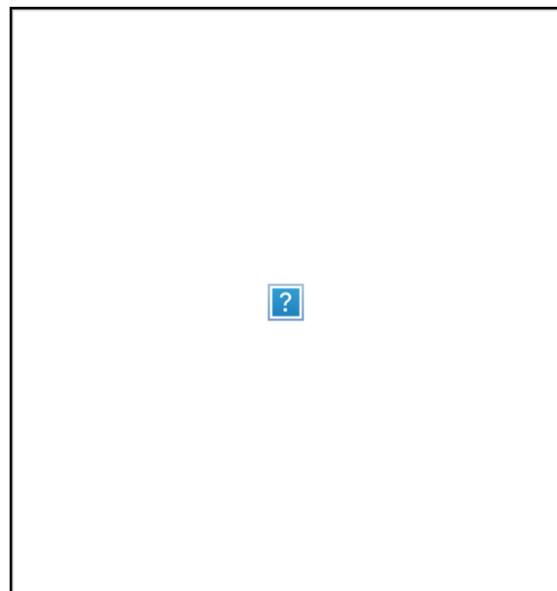
February 27, 2007

Building a dream Building a dream

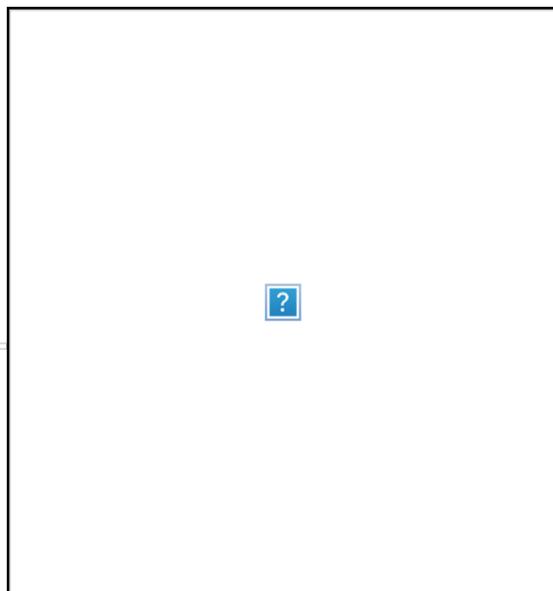
Michael Langston
FlaVarsity.com Publisher

Football is a big tradition for fans and players across the state of Florida. But for one town in remote Alaska with a population of 4,200, football is an escape. Kathy Parker, mother of Bartram Trail quarterback Kyle Parker and wife of Bartram Trail's offensive coordinator Carl Parker, is hoping to make a dream become reality. FlaVarsity.com brings you the story of her efforts to help a football team in a town called Barrow.

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Bartram Trail players stand on the type of field Project Alaska hopes to put in at Barrow High School



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When you think of football in the Sunshine State, big crowds, talented prospects and exciting finishes come to mind. However, for a school with a new football program, it's a tough progression. For a state that is more known more for it's cold weather than football, it's an even bigger challenge - especially for the kids from Barrow High School in

Alaska.

The story

A few months ago, ESPN ran an inspiring story about a first year football team rural Alaska. The players had numerous obstacles to overcome, such as weather conditions and remote location. But the most heartbreaking of all, the Whalers play on a gravel field. Kathy Parker of Jacksonville saw this story and knew right away she wanted to help.

"When I first saw the story I was sitting at home with my husband. I knew that we had to do something to help these kids because football had been such a big part of my three boys' lives. I just couldn't let go of it. I told my family we are going to get these kids a synthetic turf field and my son Kyle looked at me like I was crazy."

Bartram Trail junior quarterback Kyle Parker explained his reaction to his mother's announcement.

"I was like ok mom, if you say so. I just didn't believe it could happen because we all wanted it to come true. But she was the one person that really believed in her heart this was going to happen."

The plan

Shortly after making the announcement to her family, her real work began and *Project Alaska* was born.

"The next day Carl who works for the St. John's County Recreation & Parks, spoke with ProGrass, the company that recently installed the turf field for the parks department. They saw the same program on television and immediately wanted to help out. They offered a substantial discount and the labor to install the field."

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With a supplier on board, Parker's next focus was getting the materials to Barrow. There is only a small window of time the field can be installed this summer because of the weather conditions. The goal is to have the field ready for the start of the football season.

"I didn't talk with anyone in Alaska until I knew for sure all of this was possible. Logistics was a huge factor."

"I shared the story with a mother on my daughter's softball team and she explained her brother was in the Florida National Guard and might be able to help. Carl and I met with them the following day and they determined that we could not fly in because of the weight of the plane and the airfield's short runway. The Navy even got involved. After countless of calls, we found a private company that does ocean transports off Washington State all the way to Alaska."

Now with everything in place, Cathy Parker could now contact the Superintendent of the North Slope School District, Trent Blankenship. He explained the response had been overwhelming. She asked him if anyone had offered to install a synthetic turf field.

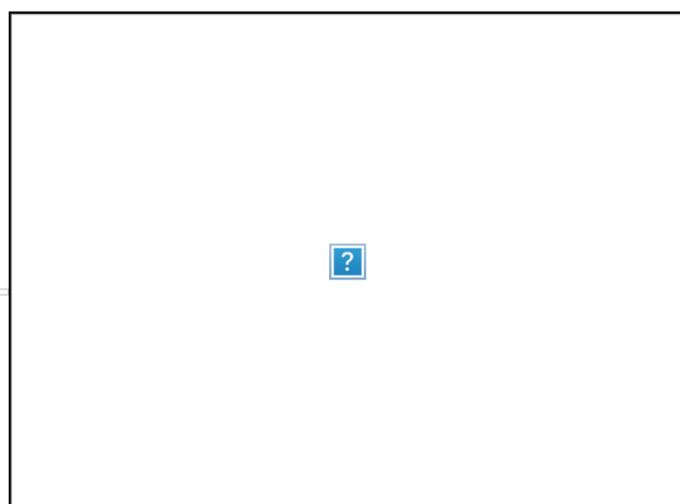
"He said no, we haven't had anyone offer that, but that would be incredible because the kids had nothing to play on but gravel and they were already getting sprained ankles and all sorts of injuries because of the hard surface. He was overcome with joy when I told him our plans to put in a synthetic turf field."

Heading to the lower 48

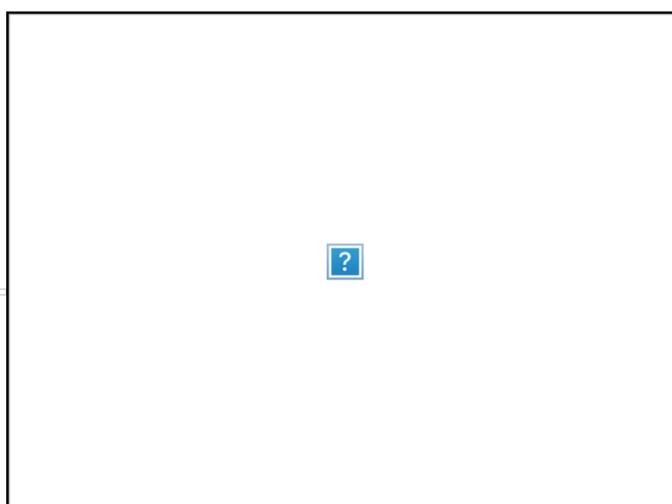
The plan didn't stop there. Superintendent Blankenship explained he had plans to bring the players to the lower 48 to learn football. Cathy Parker suggested *what better place to visit and learn about football than Florida?*

If the Whalers can raise the money to get to Florida, their housing and food would be paid for thanks to local Jacksonville sponsors. The Whalers would have the chance to watch Bartram Trail during spring practice and get instruction from the Bear's coaching staff.

"We were so excited about the plan coming into place. Kathy was steadfast about making it all happen. Bartram Trail head coach Darrell Sutherland mentioned several times how he wanted to have their kids brought over here for our spring practice so we could work with them and our kids could interact with their kids and help them set a plan or just assist the team in anyway we could," explained Carl Parker.



The Bears are part of an effort to raise money for Project Alaska



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Even the Bears football team is excited about helping the Whalers.

"You don't really think about how blessed you are as a player until you hear other players having to tackle or go up against someone on gravel. I couldn't even imagine playing on that kind of surface. We are very excited in having them come in. The guys on the team are all excited. They won one in six games last year, but our plan is to turn them into state champions," said Kyle Parker with a smile.

What you can do

Project Alaska now has one final obstacle, and it's a big one - coming up with the money to put in the turf field.

"The response has been great. We want to spread the word because this is not about Bartram Trail and Jacksonville, but this is something every football program can be a part of," added Carl Parker.

"I've had calls from coaches all over the country wondering how they could help. Teams have already issued challenges to help raise money."

Additionally, Barrow's head coach's last playing experience was twenty-five years ago. So work is in progress to help provide the coaches support.

"We are starting to build a database for them, with videos and books to help their coaches out," explained Carl Parker.

It's all about the game

The concern in Alaska when the story was first broke was if a football program was economically reasonable for the small town.

"I know there is the concern about the money the school district spends to have a football program in Barrow. Residents are concerned if the school should be spending it on other resources like computers

instead of putting together a football team. But I know the Superintendent was almost to a point of desperation because the attendance at the high school was low and the dropout rate was so high. Naturally, he wanted to give the kids another option. The thing is, if the kids aren't attending school in the first place, how will these resources help them? Football has been the driving force to keep these kids motivated and staying in school. They are already asking when they get to start practice again," explained Cathy Parker.

So why should we be concerned about a football program all the way out in Alaska when we have teams here locally that could use our help? The difference is that our kids don't have to play on a gravel field. Our weather allows grass to grow on our fields. Our players have the privilege of an experienced coaching staff, many have college and NFL backgrounds, and know the latest conditioning, plays and drills. Our teams don't have to spend tens and thousands of dollars just to have a home game. Youth football doesn't exist there, so many of Barrow's players have never played football. We take so many things for granted, simple things that aren't available to these young men. Project Alaska's objective is to give the Barrow team a chance to play the game we love so much.

Cathy Parkers says, "if the money isn't raised, then we will find another way. But it will happen."

If you want to help Barrow get their synthetic turf field, to go the Project Alaska at a www.projectalaskaturf.com to make your donation. The goal is to raise \$500,000. Contributions are tax-deductible.

FlaVarsity.com will continue to follow this story and bring you updates. We'll be Jacksonville in the spring when the Whalers visit Bartram Trail.

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