

Why Crozet: Find Fun & Community in Recreation

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Elias Fatsi is credited with bringing bike polo to Crozet. Photo: Malcolm Andrews.

We're always curious about why people chose to live here, and why they stay here. Nature lovers have plenty to occupy them in the mountains and trails. Others prove that you don't need a big city to have plenty of opportunity for organized recreational events, whether competitive, educational or just for fun. Those who enjoy an active life along with others who have the same interests can find a place here, too. We highlight two

possibilities in the article below, the 21st in our series.

A New Sport in Crozet

You don't need a new Trek or Yeti or a new mountain bike of any kind to become a player in the little-known sport of bike polo, now gearing up in Crozet. "Probably the best bike for our purpose is an older bike you might have just lying around," said Elias Fatsi, the leader of the small band of enthusiasts who've been facing off against each other each week since late summer at Crozet Park. "Just wipe off the cobwebs and join us." Fancy equipment is discouraged for this sport, at least in Crozet, because you might pick up a few bends or dents while navigating around other bikes headed your way, all balanced one-handed by a driver with a mallet in the other hand.

Fatsi was introduced to the sport when he lived in Colorado and played with a group in Boulder that had been together for many years. "I've always loved bikes," he said, "and anything I can do on a bike, I'll give it a try."



Scott Brown, Steve Bates and Frank Hall in a hard-fought bike polo match. Photo: Malcolm Andrews.

The Crozet brand of bike polo is played on grass, in a space that's not too large. Large areas of cement are for hard-core players, Fatsi said, because of the speed and coordination necessary to reach the goal. Other than that, there are only a few rules, Fatsi said. "Well, one of them is to be nice to each other."

Another rule: Polo players can't ever put a foot down, or they'll suffer a penalty. The team provides the mallets and the small soccer ball as well as the markers that signify the goal.

"That's pretty much it," he said. There are no positions, no uniforms. The teams are small (typically three on three) so that everyone knows who's on

their team and they cooperate on getting the ball to the goal, a makeshift affair marked by driveway flags.

While the rules are easy to understand, the actual execution is a little more difficult. "This is for people who are very comfortable on a bike," Fatsi said. They'll always have the mallet in one hand, leaving only one hand to steer the bike. He observed that often young people who rely on their bikes for transportation as well as recreation are those most adept at doing almost anything on a bike. "We'd love to have some younger people join us," he said.

Linda McNeil, Fatsi's neighbor on Crozet's St. George Avenue and a novice player, said a sense of humor is a good quality to bring to the match, whether you're a player or a spectator. "For me personally, dribbling, passing, getting into position, and scoring on a two-wheeled hunk of metal steered by one hand, while trying not to fall off or crash into another player can reach an almost Marx Brothers' level of slapstick hilarity."

Interested in bike polo? Join the email group at groups.io/g/crozetbikepolo or visit the website at crozetbikepolo.com.

A Hidden Gem in Greenwood

There's roller skating, clogging, tai chi, Essentrics, karate and yoga at the Greenwood Community Center, throughout the year, in addition to the ball fields outside that are used in season. Joe Clark, supervisor of Albemarle County's recreation program, called the center, tucked away on Greenwood Loop within a few miles of Rte. 250, a "hidden gem." Clark said the county has also offered the grounds to anyone who needs WiFi. "The signal is quite strong here," Clark said. "I've seen several people sitting outside working in their cars." On a mild fall day, Clark was taking advantage of the signal himself. He encouraged those who might need a quiet place with internet access in less pleasant weather to reserve a spot inside.



The Greenwood Community Center was dedicated in 1950, the product of a huge community effort

The venerable structure was the vision of charismatic minister Lee Marston who mustered huge community support more than 70 years ago to serve the same purpose it does today. Now it's part of the Albemarle County Parks and Recreation Department, and the main center for recreational classes in the Crozet area.



Linda Langman leads a tai chi class at the Greenwood Community Center. The regular teacher is Brad Bennett, the program director for Cloud Hands West. Photo: Malcolm Andrews.

"I could go to Charlottesville for Tai Chi, but I doubt if anyone would even talk to me," said student Charles Hild. "Here, everyone is friendly. If you have a question, someone will answer it. And everyone wants to help." Bev Hovencamp agreed: "This is a very welcoming group."

Hild's class is regularly taught by Brad Bennett, with other teachers stepping in while he's away. One of them is Susan Spengler, a long-time Tai Chi practitioner, who began her practice in hopes of healing a badly-sprained ankle. "It wasn't getting better, despite physical therapy," she said. "I felt so much better that I stayed in it for the long term. And I'll be able to continue into my 70s, 80s, even my 90s."

Spengler noticed when classes resumed after the pandemic interruption, they weren't as full, probably because people are still wary about venturing out. "We have so much space to spread out here," she said. "And when

weather permits, we practice outside."

Yoga teacher Carol Brown has been leading chair, beginner's and intermediate yoga practice at Greenwood for 12 years or so. "We have a great space and great light for our classes, and the County has been wonderful to work with," she said. There's an additional savings besides commuting costs for those taking classes there, she said: "At \$6 per class, it's very affordable." People sign up for a ten-week session, so they're not obligated for a year. She also mentioned the congenial atmosphere. People in her classes have become friends, sometimes celebrate birthdays, or get together outside class.

To use the WiFi, just pull into the grounds and check your signal. To inquire about any of the classes, or to ask about indoor WiFi, email Joe Clark, jclark@albemarle.org.