

# SOMA Basketball Boosters play ball

👤 **Maryanne Christiano-Mistretta** ⌚ Published: November 9, 2025 | Updated: November 5, 2025 ⌚ 3 min read 👁 127 views



*SOMA Basketball Boosters Vice President Taylor Valentine is pictured here with SOMA Basketball Boosters' fifth- and sixth-grade girls.*

SOMA Basketball Boosters was created by Tracy Flanagan and Taylor Valentine with a goal of making sure that everyone has access to the game regardless of circumstances.

"Kids that can't afford equipment or fees can get on the floor with other kids," said Valentine, who is the vice president in charge of community relations and fundraising. Flanagan is the president.

The non-profit organization provides scholarships to players, supports local student-athletes of all ages and competition levels and aims to increase access to basketball to anyone interested. It also acts as a clearinghouse with information about all kinds of basketball related programs in the two towns.

Valentine has a history with coaching youth sports.



SOMA Basketball Boosters Vice President Taylor Valentine is pictured here with SOMA Basketball Boosters' fifth- and sixth-grade girls.

"I loved it," he said.

But when his 9-year-old daughter wanted to play basketball he couldn't find a program open to everyone. He felt the primary goal was having fun, not competing.

That's when SOMA Hoops was launched.

"It's the joy of my life," said Valentine.

A year after that, SOMA Basketball Boosters came to fruition. They partnered with YMCA's Buddy Basketball program.

"Playing with an older buddy makes them feel comfortable with a coach on the court," Valentine said. "We support programs and make it better. We want to show there is a healthy way to play a sport within a town. We are talking about 99 percent of kids. They feel proud of what they're a part of."

According to Valentine, the growth of girls in basketball is "off the charts." He said that their girl members are rivaling their boy members.

SOMA Basketball Boosters has a free basketball program for families who may not have the funds to participate. They not only need the program, but they need shorts, a jersey and shoes.

"We had three families take us up on it," Valentine said. "We're keeping that confidential. Your child will be in basketball."

Valentine shared the story of one of their sponsors who couldn't afford a pair of sneakers when he was in the ninth grade. Valentine told him, "I want you to know, every kid who asks for a pair of sneakers will get one."

It's a big starting point, putting kids on a basketball court, according to Valentine. Then getting in between the lines in order to grow the kids, to grow healthy sportsmanship, going the extra mile and getting everyone involved from businesses to the schools, to the parents, to the caregivers, to the volunteers—Valentine believes it can be done really well.

"You have to actively seek these opportunities out and sometimes you have to create them," Valentine said. "People say, 'I want to give my kid a place to play in a way that's memorable and doesn't create an upper league mentality.' Basketball is a thing people want their kids to try. I want the kids to feel part of something with pride."

Earlier this year, Valentine connected with Clinton Elementary School physical education teacher Arie Sladowsky to explore how SOMA Basketball could assist with the school's physical education program.

After discussing their needs, Sladowsky shared that the school was in need of new basketballs, cones, and ball rebounders. Thanks to generous donations and sponsorships from local businesses SOMA Basketball Boosters were able to fulfill the school's request and provide the necessary supplies.

Since SOMA Basketball Boosters began, other programs have launched like SOMA Volleyball and SOMA Soccer is about to launch in the Spring of 2026, according to Valentine.

Valentine offers much credit to Matt Gray who is with the Department of Recreation and Cultural Affairs in South Orange.

"We couldn't do all we're doing if we didn't have partners who genuinely believe we can do better," Valentine said.

To learn more about SOMA Basketball Boosters, visit: <https://somabasketballboosters.org/>.