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**Feature Story**

**SPORTS SUPERKIDS: TURNING KIDS INTO SUPER HEROES**

The year is 1992. A 12-year-old boy suffering from leukemia sits in Chicago, Ill, wishing he could watch his favorite team, the Washington Redskins, on TV. Little does he know that he is in for one of the biggest surprises of his life.

At the same time in another state a man named Bob Lane lives in Virginia Beach, Va. On a particular day, Lane goes to his local bank and starts a conversation with the teller whom he knows. She asks him if he has read the article in the *Virginia Pilot* about a young boy in Chicago who is dying from leukemia. He tells her no, but adds that he will look at it. The teller is touched by the story and asked Lane to read the article and see if he could do anything to help him; he says he will try.

Six weeks before the article came out, Lane’s son, a highway patrolman in North Carolina, has pulled someone over in a routine traffic stop. The person he pulls over is Bill Bowden, a Washington D.C. metropolitan police officer who also happens to work security at Washington Redskins games. After Lane was asked to see if he could do something for Josh in Chicago, he decided to see if his son could get in contact with Bowden in hopes that the latter could lend a hand. Lane asked Bowden for his help and Bowden said he’d be more than willing to help out.

The next week Lane, as he often does, bought tickets and went to the Redskins game. He met Officer Bowden outside the stadium and asked if he could maybe get into the locker room after the game. He was told to come back to the same location at halftime and Bowden would tell him if he could arrange it. At halftime they met again and Lane was told that he would be granted access to the locker room after the game.

After the game Lane was escorted down to the locker room, where he began to collect card signatures for Josh from all of the players. A large man in a suit approached him and asked him what he was doing. Lane explained to him that he was collecting signatures for a dying little boy in Chicago, whose favorite team was the Washington Redskins. The man took the cards, and came back with Sonny Jergensen’s, the Redskins quarterback, and Coach Joe Gibbs’ autographs.

Later on, when Lane and Gibbs were left in the locker room, Gibbs said to call him in the morning at Redskins Park; and that he, along with several players, would call Josh in the morning in addition to signing the cards.

This experience prompted Lane to start the Sports Superkids program. “I felt I had accomplished something good” he said, and he did not want to stop there; he wanted to help other children see their favorite sports teams as well. To this day, Lane has taken 450 families with sick and terminally ill children to Redskins games. He also takes families to local sporting events such as Norfolk Tides baseball games, Hampton Roads Admirals hockey games, and Old Dominion basketball games. Lane hopes to continue the program for another 20 years before handing it off to someone who will replace him.

The first funding that Bob had for the program was from a local bar and from a golf tournament helped the program get on its feet. Today the program is funded by several companies including Walmart, The Hogettes, The Noblemen (businessmen who hold fundraisers and events for the program) and AJ Gators Sports Bar and Grill—one of the original contributors in Virginia Beach. These businesses make it possible for Bob to create an experience that many of these families will not soon forget.

One participant in the program is Aaron Moore. Moore is 13 years old and is a severe burn victim. He loves reading, playing the saxophone, and, of course, watching football. Moore is a devoted New Orleans Saints fan but when the opportunity to see the Redskins in person came up he couldn’t say no. Lane took Aaron and his family to the Redskins matchup versus the Houston Texans, “It was exciting…I did a lot of screaming and stuff,” Moore said about the game. After the game Moore was escorted to the locker room to meet some players. He shook hands with Kicker Graham Gano and got to meet quarterback Donovan McNabb. When asked what he thought about meeting the players he responded “Donovan was a lot taller than I thought he would be,” he remembered, but that only made the experience more memorable. The best part for Moore was simply “just being able to go,” he said.

The Sports Superkids Program was founded on the principle of helping those in need. Moore is only one example of the happiness that the program has brought so many. Lane started the program on the request of a friend and made many friends in the process. The thought never occurred to Lane that he would be starting a program that would help many children make lasting memories. Moore is just one example of the happiness the program brings to so many. With your donations, the program can continue to operate and help sick children have an experience that they will never forget. ###

**About AJ Gators**

AJ Gators is owned by Jeff Share and Al Zuhars. The restaurants started 12 years ago in Hampton Roads, Va, and has since expanded to include locations all over Virginia. Our local AJ Gators was open for business on August 15th of this year and is ready for patrons of all ages.