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Baseball team gets uniform grant

— Julia Terruso

A three-year-old travel baseball club catering to urban youths received a \$13,000 grant this week to pay for 150 uniforms and team equipment.

The South Jersey Pride Baseball Club was founded by Pennsauken resident Johnny Almanti, 43, a retail manager in Cherry Hill. He has two sons in it.

The club is open to South Jersey boys ages 10 to 16. It particularly aims to serve children from lower-income neighborhoods who are interested in travel baseball. An average year with the club costs about \$250, compared with some travel teams that cost upward of \$2,000, Almanti said.

In the last three years, he said, the club has not had matching uniforms and has played with inadequate equipment.

The Camden County Council on Economic Opportunity Inc., a nonprofit that aims to help underserved county residents, submitted a grant proposal to the Baseball Tomorrow Fund on behalf of the club.

The Baseball Tomorrow Fund, a joint initiative of the Major League Baseball Players Association and Major League Baseball, promotes youth baseball and softball, and has awarded more than 800 grants totaling \$27 million since 1999. The fund committed

\$13,275 for uniforms and equipment for South Jersey Pride.

The club has 125 players and will be able to add 50. Almanti said he is focusing recruitment on Camden City. Almanti may be contacted at 856-952-4206.

Arnold Byrd, executive director of Camden County OEO, said in a news release, "We are excited to utilize this generous donation so that the SJPBC can enhance its baseball experience while continuing to provide a great mentorship program."

Almanti said the grant helps boys interested in baseball but hindered by its costs. "There's the shoes and the bat and not everyone can afford it," Almanti said. "This means a lot, because it means we can help more kids through mentorship and baseball."

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