

Vista Bahia Park, Arlie Waterman Field a Little Leaguers' Field of Dreams

By Aleta Walther
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Vista Bahia Park has a picnic area, tables, benches and ocean and mountain views, but it is its historic baseball field, batting cages and bullpens that take center stage at this remote park in the southeast end of San Clemente. American novelist John Updike once described Fenway Park as a “little lyrical bandbox of a ballpark.”

Although Vista Bahia's Arlie Waterman Field may not be in the same league as Fenway Park, calling it a “little lyrical bandbox of a ballpark” is an apt description for this beloved ball field. Built in 1954, the ball field looks much the same as it did 57 years ago.

Located at 402 Calle Bahia, Vista Bahia Park and Arlie Waterman Field are nestled between the neighborhood of Presidential Heights, the San Clemente Golf Course and the Trap and Skeet Club. Although the ball field is open to the public, San Clemente Little League has a permit that gives club members playing preference. San Clemente Little League players pretty much occupy the field from 3 p.m. to 10 p.m. weekdays and 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. The league has 96 teams consisting of 1,100 players ranging from age 5 to 14, but only major boys-age 11 to 12-play at Waterman Field.

“It is a spectacular field,” said Sam Massoto, president of San Clemente Little League. “It is the only Little League field that I am aware of in South Orange County that actually has its dugouts below ground.” Due to its sheer numbers, San Clemente Little League hosts games at a variety of San Clemente parks. Little League players, however, consider Waterman Field special because of its nostalgic ambiance and amenities.

“When you consider everything, Waterman Field is our premier ball field,” said Massoto. “For the boys, there is an aura about the field. Only the major boys-11- and 12-year olds-play there so when they get to play there it is a big deal. It's like they have graduated; they are the big men on campus.”

Waterman Field often hosts 10 Little League games on Saturday and another 10 games on Sunday with 300 to 400 spectators filling the bleachers and overflowing on to Bahia Park's grassy areas and picnic benches. In 1994, the San Clemente City Council christened Vista Bahia's ball field Arlie Waterman Field. Waterman lived in San Clemente 46 years, 22 of which he was the city's superintendent of Parks and Recreation. Waterman was also one of the founders of the San Clemente Little League.

Vista Bahia Park is open 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. If you wish to reserve any part of the park for an event of 50 or more people, or bring equipment to the park such as a bounce house, a permit is required. For more park information, call 949.361.8264.

This is the fifth in a weekly series highlighting San Clemente's parks. The article is provided by the city through its Beaches, Parks and Recreation Department.