

# Manatees migrate to Kissimmee

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KISSIMMEE — The field at Osceola County Stadium on Wednesday looked ready for a baseball game.

Until next spring, the name game will have to do.

Osceola County officials and members of the Brevard County Manatees' ownership and management announced the Class A Florida State League team will move to Kissimmee, starting with the 2017 season. The three-year agreement includes options that could take the deal to 25 years, team president Joe Harrington said.



Winter Park residents Dr. Tom Winters and his wife, Dr. Rebecca Morooso, are owners of the Manatees. (Stephen Ruiz/staff)

"Minor-league baseball is fun to have, but you're not going to get rich off it," said Manatees part-owner Dr. Tom Winters, who lives in Winter Park. "We're not trying to do that. What we're trying to do is to have fun with this. It can be a whole lot more fun if I can get in the car, come down and be here 20-25 minutes after work."

The franchise, a tenant at Space Coast Stadium in Viera since 1994, has started a name-the-team contest at [probasketballbackincentralflorida.com](http://probasketballbackincentralflorida.com). Submissions will be accepted through July 13, and fans can vote on six finalists from July 18-29.

Harrington said ticket deposits will be accepted, starting July 11.

The agreement has been discussed for more than a year. Winters said the expected move by the Houston Astros and Washington Nationals to a joint complex in West Palm Beach for spring training next year propelled discussions.

The Astros are leaving Kissimmee, where they have trained since 1985, and the Nationals are departing Viera.

"For us, it was being recruited by the Osceola County commissioners as well as the county manager and Don Miers with the Osceola County government," Harrington said. "They felt an opportunity presented itself with the Astros not being here. They were looking for another long-term tenant, and we wanted to fit that."

County commissioner Brandon Arrington said the move's economic impact likely won't be known until after the 2017 season, but Osceola wants to maximum the potential of its 5,300-seat stadium. He said the county has discussed internally whether to reach out to national teams from other countries about possibly facing Major League Baseball teams in exhibition games in Kissimmee.

"People are excited that we have continued to keep professional sports here in Osceola County," Arrington said. "I have a very high minority population district [that enjoys baseball]. Folks are excited about it. Folks are also excited about the cheap entertainment value that they are going to get."

The FSL will return to Osceola for the first time since 2000, the Kissimmee Cobras' final season. This announcement will give the Sentinel's coverage area two franchises in the 12-team league. The Daytona Tortugas are a Cincinnati Reds affiliate.

The Manatees, who considered moving to Winter Park two years ago, are in the Milwaukee Brewers' organization.

"When we bought the team [in 2004], I always had the thought that it would be nice if there was a team closer to our home, my backyard," Winters said. "I'll be very honest with you. The opportunities didn't arise. We had talked to Winter Park, and we came very, very close on a situation there."

Now Kissimmee has a team with no name.

For the time being.