

October 3, 2017

For Immediate Release

Contact

Derrick K. Baker (312) 497-1604

Willy Meaux (202) 498-6590

Charles Merrick (312) 502-4238

Chicago and Washington, D.C. Student-Athletes Build Character and Camaraderie Through Community Service Program in Nation's Capital *DRW College Prep Girls' Basketball Team to Fellowship With Georgetown Titans Hockey Team, Work in Community Garden in Food Desert and Tour Renowned City Landmarks*

An enriching educational and character-building exposure outing will unite Chicago high school student-athletes from North Lawndale and elementary school-age student-athletes from Washington, D.C., as members of the girls' varsity basketball team from DRW College Prep travel on Thursday, Oct. 5 on a life-changing, cross-cultural community service trip to meet and fellowship with youth on the Georgetown Titans hockey team.

Together the student-athletes will work in the community garden of the Georgetown Titans' charity partner DC Urban Greens to prepare the gardens to plant and harvest fresh produce for inner-city residents in the under-served Anacostia neighborhood in the nation's capital in addition to participating in other character-building outings and tours over the weekend.

Sponsored by the nationally known youth sport training, education and advocacy program Play Like A Champion Today Educational Series and the community conscious Old St. Patrick's Church in Chicago's West Loop, the multiday experience – which will be the first out-of-town trip for most members of the DRW College Prep girls' team – will emphasize how team sports facilitates character- and confidence-building, selflessness, community service and teamwork.

Members of both teams, who will meet for the first time, will work together in a two-acre garden that was started years ago by DC Urban Greens, the charity partners of the Georgetown Titans, to support residents in the Anacostia neighborhood that is a food desert. The fruits of their labor will provide fresh produce like tomatoes, squash, various greens and okra for area residents, and for Titans team members whose families also are in need.

The faith-based Titans sports program comprises a culturally and socio-economically diverse roster of 67 youth in kindergarten to 8th grade, including those from Anacostia and other under-served communities in Washington, D.C. The organization offers a low-cost, skills-based hockey program to boys and girls in the D.C. metro area, many of whom are not able to participate in more expensive programs.

“Our youth are looking forward to meeting the young ladies from DRW College Prep and they're equally excited about partnering with the players to work in the community garden we have proudly maintained for many years,” says Willy Meaux, founder and director of coaching for the Georgetown Titans. “Our program has always been a faith-based, inclusive one that

uses sports to help youth from many backgrounds build character, broaden their horizons and prepare for their future, which we hope includes going to college.

“This will be a great opportunity for our kids to use sports as a bridge to their personal growth and development,” adds Meaux, “and yet another important opportunity to learn how to overcome challenges they may face every day.”

Charles Merrick, director of Recruitment and Enrollment and DRW College Prep girls' varsity basketball coach, says the 14 young ladies ready to embark on the trip are thrilled and anxious.

“For our students to succeed, they need to see different neighborhoods, have new experiences and meet new people,” says Merrick. “There is a huge difference between ‘seeing’ and ‘saying.’ Because too many of our students rarely have an opportunity to travel outside of Chicago and the state, visiting the nation’s capital and touring college campuses like Howard University and visiting the National African American History museum certainly will be life-changing experiences and highlights. When students broaden their horizons, their outlook of life opens in a number of positive ways.”

He continued: “This trip, including our tour of Georgetown University and seeing a world-class facility like the John R. Thompson Jr. Intercollegiate Athletic Center on Georgetown’s campus, will make the students’ goals more tangible and achievable. Our sincere appreciation goes to Old St. Pat’s and Play Like A Champion for making it all possible.”

Merrick adds that because there is a need for more positive portrayals of inner city communities like North Lawndale to help motivate youth, the trip will have positive, long-lasting outcomes beyond his team and school. “They will be able to bring back important information to their peers and neighbors to inspire them as well.”

DRW College Prep, 931 S. Homan Ave. in North Lawndale, is a member of the Noble Network of Charter Schools.

The young ladies on the team will be accompanied by six adult chaperones; the group will travel by Amtrak train (also a first for many players) on Thursday, Oct. 5 at 6:40 p.m. They will return to Chicago on Tuesday, Oct. 10 at 8:45 a.m.

The genesis of this city-to-city, student-athlete collaboration dates back to exchanges between coaches Merrick and Meaux at Play Like a Champion Today’s national leadership conference this past summer. The conference engaged participants in what Merrick described as “genuine conversations about race and community.”

Play Like a Champion Today is committed to building a responsible sports culture that promotes the intellectual and moral as well as athletic development of all student-athletes, especially those from economically distressed communities.

The North Lawndale Kinship Initiative, a community development outreach of Old St. Patrick's Catholic Church, also helped make the trip possible. The 6,000-member congregation in

Chicago's West Loop engaged to help make the worthwhile experience possible as they frequently do with other organizations in the North Lawndale neighborhood where DRW is located.