

MJCHF, MCHA, AHA partner to offer “Future All Stars” basketball program, field trips for area youth

by Ethan Wibben

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EDWARDSVILLE - The **Madison County Housing Authority (MCHA)** and **Alton Housing Authority (AHA)** are homes for many youth whose parents received subsidized funding support and are not fortunate to have many of the positive opportunities afforded to other children of their ages.

The **MCHA and the AHA** are partnering with the **Mannie Jackson Center for Humanities Foundation (MJCHF)** to offer community programming and educational opportunities to children of these residences. The partnership focuses on the MJCHF four pillars of Respect, Dignity, Understanding and Forgiveness.

The MCHA and AHA are offering the “Future All Stars” basketball program and field trips for area youth who reside in Madison County housing. The “Future All Stars” basketball games are held on Saturdays for approximately 130 children kindergarten through middle school age participants.

The program uses the **Mannie Jackson Center for Humanities’ four pillars – Respect, Dignity, Understanding and Forgiveness** to teach youth to excel academically and improve in their social behavior.

“Many of our youth have watched the World Famous Harlem Globetrotters on TV and when they are told that local hero Mannie Jackson once performed as a Harlem Globetrotter and is the former owner, the children are even more excited about embracing the four pillars of Respect, Dignity, Understanding and Forgiveness,” said **Andy Hightower**, Executive Director of the Madison County Housing Authority.

“We want to use the ‘Future All Stars’ program as a tool to let kids know it starts in the school classroom,” said Marie Nelson, Management Coordinator at MCHA. “If our students are not performing academically, or demonstrating good behavior in school, they are not allowed to participate. We are demonstrating to our youth that school comes first and we want to prepare them to be successful in later life. It is so positive and gratifying to see more than 200 parents in attendance, supporting their children on Saturday mornings.”

“Saturday activities, such as basketball provides structure, teamwork and assists our youth how to work together,” said **Gregory Denton**, Executive Director of the Alton Housing Authority and pastor at Bread of Life Fellowship Church. “They are learning that everything is not about ‘I’ but about ‘We’, and that they must learn to succeed together. It further teaches life lessons about winning and losing. This program introduces kids to other kids from other communities and cultures and teaches respect, dignity, understanding and forgiveness which are sadly missing in today’s society.”

Denton also said that, “I am really pleased by the behavior and attitudes of the young people participating in our Saturday morning youth program. Our youth is learning to work together in unity and learning that they can become whatever they want to in life be if they work hard in the classroom and demonstrate good character in their community.”

Christopher Hobbs, a 12-year-old, stated, “I’m learning teamwork and respect for my opponents.” Gabe Paulette Jr., another 12-year-old basketball player, also enjoys teamwork and helping his friends to be better players. “My favorite thing about playing basketball is having fun and it has taught me to play until the last second,” said 12-year-old Marquan Knight.

Adrian Elliott, an 11-year-old, said, “I like everything about basketball. I’ve learned that we need to work together and not play selfish and to share the ball.”

Both housing authorities have room for more children looking to join the “Future All Stars” program and said to contact MCHA or AHA if you are wishing to join.

The MCHA, AHA, and the Mannie Jackson Center for Humanities MJCHF collaborated in taking approximately 175 youth to the Missouri History Museum to view and participate in the production of, “And In This Corner... Cassius Clay.”

“With all of the negativity occurring around the world it is easy to be consumed by it and with the events of Ferguson, Missouri, and the subsequent racial tension in the St. Louis area, we want to inspire local youth to bring positive social change to the community,” said Andy Hightower. “Our young people are searching for answers, but many do not know what, or even how, to begin talking about issue.”

The play told the story of Muhammad Ali (then Cassius Clay, Jr.) and how he chose to use his success to bring positive light to the community. The play follows Cassius from when he first begun boxing at the age of 12 with a white policeman named Joe Martin, to his fight with Sonny Liston. The story shows how Cassius became an international sports hero and how he learned that he could change the world to become a more positive place to live.

“The play showed the racial barriers that Muhammad Ali had to go through and demonstrated to our youth how they must deal with barriers and how to bring positivity and respect to the community,” said Marie Nelson.

Caurie Wilson, an 11-year-old, said, “We learned that Muhammad Ali won a gold medal in the Winter Olympics and stood up to the neighborhood bully and was a leader. The play taught me how to succeed in my goals in life and now I feel like I can become a positive leader.”

Shylise Powell, a 9-year-old, said, “I learned that Muhammad Ali learned how to box from a white police man. The play taught me to be humble and not to brag and to show respect.”

Ja’Mia Craig, a 10-year-old, said, “We learned that Muhammad Ali was treated unfairly because he was African American. When he stood up for himself in the only whites allowed restaurant it taught me to stand up for myself. I learned to never be scared to be myself.”

