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***New Kalamazoo Summer Youth Opportunity:  
The First Tee LINK***



The Kalamazoo Junior Golf Association (KJGA) is announcing a new summer youth program that will be based at Red Arrow Golf Course in downtown Kalamazoo – The First Tee LINK. The program is a product of The First Tee, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to *“impact the lives of young people by providing education programs that build character, instill life-enhancing values and promote healthy choices through the game of golf.”*

The KJGA, a local 501(c)(3) corporation, has been providing golf instruction, competitive tournaments, and college scholarship opportunities annually to over 350 junior golfers in Kalamazoo since 1987. The KJGA is excited about offering The First Tee LINK to the youth of the community.

“We have a strong junior golf program in Kalamazoo which will continue. The addition of The First Tee LINK to our offerings will help us to reach a new group of young people,” stated Dean Marks, President of the KJGA and Director of Golf for the Kalamazoo Municipal Golf Association (KMGA). “The focus of The First Tee LINK is really helping kids understand and ultimately develop The First Tee Nine Core Values: honesty, integrity, sportsmanship, respect, confidence, responsibility, perseverance, courtesy and judgement. Each lesson incorporates one of the Core Values. Golf is just the vehicle to deliver the message.”

In addition to providing The First Tee LINK, the KJGA has reached an agreement with the KMGA to operate Red Arrow Golf Course. All proceeds from Red Arrow will now go directly to fund the programs provided by the KJGA. The KMGA is the advisory board for the City of Kalamazoo, and manages Eastern Hills, Milham Park, and Red Arrow Golf Courses.

Bob Bales, PGA Member and Director of Instruction at Red Arrow, will oversee both the delivery of The First Tee LINK and operations at the Red Arrow Facility.

“We can’t say enough about the dedicated group of volunteers who have kept Red Arrow open these past few years. Red Arrow would just be a memory without them. Volunteers will still be key to our existence. It is our job now to expand on their great work and improve the golf course and provide additional recreational opportunities to the community,” says Bales.

Last year, Red Arrow added “Foot Golf” and plans are in place to add “Disc Golf” this spring. “A family can come out and Mom and Dad can play regular golf and the kids can either play Foot or Disc golf if they want. The best part is that kids under 15 are free with a full paid adult. All fees will be just \$5 per round,” stated Bales.

The First Tee LINK will start the week of June 20<sup>th</sup>. Participants will meet in 90 minute sessions twice a week for three weeks at Red Arrow. The KJGA will host a morning and late afternoon session. For 2016, space will be limited to 15-20 participants per session. The KJGA is planning on a second session beginning the week of July 18<sup>th</sup>, and perhaps a third in August depending on demand. The First Tee LINK will be offered primarily for young people ages 7-10, but older youth are welcome to apply.

“This first year is basically a pilot program for Kalamazoo and we want to provide a positive experience for our kids. Our goal will be to expand programming in 2017 and beyond as our coaches and participants become familiar with The First Tee LINK and more families hear about how much fun golf can be!” stated Bales.

Mitch Wilson, Development Director, added “one of the main reasons to offer The First Tee LINK at Red Arrow is to reach urban youth with the program. We know that transportation can be problematic for families. By being right downtown, we hope to eliminate that barrier. We plan to reach out to organizations such as the Boys & Girls Club and the Douglass Community Center and work together to bring a new experience to these youngsters.”

The cost per session will be \$90 for participants. Scholarships will be available to ensure that access is available to any youth who wants to participate. Equipment is not a requirement – kids just need to attend! The KJGA will be hosting an open house for The First Tee LINK on Sunday, June 5<sup>th</sup> from 3 to 5pm. Families, volunteers and the public at large are all invited to find out more about the program.

“As with any worthwhile program, it comes with a cost”, continued Wilson, “With a grant from the Gerber Foundation, we were able to send four individuals to The First Tee’s Level I Coach training—a requirement for offering The First Tee LINK—which is three days long and very in-depth. The individual session fee barely scratches the surface of our program cost.”

“We have a goal of fund raising \$50,000 this year to go towards making The First Tee LINK available and to enhance operations at Red Arrow. We receive no funding from the City. We will be looking for help from individuals, companies, and foundations. Of course, the more rounds that are played at Red Arrow, the less we will have to fund raise!”

The KMGA and KJGA will be jointly hosting a golf benefit at Milham Park on July 29<sup>th</sup>. All proceeds will go to benefit Red Arrow and the KJGA. Anyone interested in participating or sponsoring the event can contact Milham Park Golf Course at 269-344-7639.

Please make an impact either as a participant or by supporting the KJGA! Go to [www.kalamazoojuniorgolf.org](http://www.kalamazoojuniorgolf.org) to register a participant for a The First Tee LINK session, donate, register for the golf outing, or find out about volunteer opportunities. Contact the KJGA directly by emailing to [KJGA@KalamazooJuniorGolf.org](mailto:KJGA@KalamazooJuniorGolf.org) or phoning 269-447-1484.