

Let the games begin

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Third season of youth program gets under way

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Families across the city gathered at the West End park Tuesday evening to witness the kickoff of the third season of the Kennedy-King Youth Basketball League.

What started as an intervention program — a means to give children something fun and safe to do during summer — has grown every year, and is now open to kids ages 7 to 15.

Two of the boys who helped inspire the program, founded by Loni Gamble, spoke at the ceremony, which included Mayor Mary B. Wolf, 13 coaches and more than 80 children.

Gamble said that a few years ago he began asking young people what they liked to do for fun. Bruce White and Shariff Monroe, both 13, told Gamble that they enjoyed basketball.

"These boys asked for it," Gamble said.

"We've been in it since it started," White said. "We thought it was all about basketball but it's not."

"We didn't feel like kids had enough to do," Gamble said.

Before he knew it, he added, 60 children had registered to play and the city Housing Authority had come on board.

This year, Wolf said, the program will include workshops on violence prevention and anti-bullying, making smart choices, HIV prevention, anger management and community service.

"We call it intervention, but really, what we're doing is building community," said Wolf. "We're teaching ideals that are important to any good and healthy community."

She thanked parents, and urged them to remain involved in their children's lives and attend basketball games.



KATIE PRINCE/Sun-Gazette

The Junior Juneteenth Jewels show the crowd what they've got at the kickoff ceremony for the Kennedy-King Youth Basketball League at West End Park Tuesday evening.



RALPH WILSON/Sun-Gazette



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Bruce White, left in left photo, and Shariff Monroe speak of the basketball program at the Kennedy-King Apartments Tuesday. At right, members of the Lil' Sixers warm up for their first game of the season. This year is the first that children age 7 to 9 are allowed to play.

Many people and businesses from the community were recognized for helping make the league a success. Representatives from the Masonic Lodge 106 presented Gamble with a check for \$5,000.

Because of other contributions, the league is the only one like it in the state that boasts an electronic scoreboard, Gamble said. There is a concession stand and

bleachers, courtesy of the Williamsport-Lycoming Foundation, and a donation from the Newberry Lions Club bought jerseys for all of the players.

Family members enjoyed the activities, including Shariff Mercer performing a slow jazz number on the saxophone and the Newberry Twisters drill team and the Junior Juneteenth Jewels doing their routines.

After the ceremony, the 7-to-9-year-old teams played a game.

"Part of my dream is coming true," said Lawrence Bower, of the housing authority.

"When we bought this lot it was like a jungle." Now, the park has both a basketball court and a skate park.

"We are gonna go further," Bower said, "as far as we can go."