

West Side Alumni Foundation Giving Back from the Heart

Gary, Indiana is often depicted in the media and films as a tough, crime-ridden town that people can't get away from fast enough. But that isn't always the case. There's a lot of love for the 'Steel City' and it extends far and wide. During their 40th high school reunion, a group of West Side High School Class of '74 graduates pledged to do something about the deteriorating condition of their alma mater. What followed was a series of monthly conference calls, emails, and in 2014, the **West Side Alumni Foundation, Incorporated (WSAF)** was founded.

To make a difference at the now re-named West Side Leadership Academy (WSLA) takes dollars and a commitment; and the WSAF founders are putting their money where their heartfelt interests are, making personal donations, holding fundraisers, and soliciting funds from the Gary business community, alumni, and friends of the school. On June 3, 2015, the WSAF achieved its 501(c)(3) tax exempt and Public Charity status; and as such, all contributions to WSAF are tax-deductible and go toward the betterment of the students and the school facility.

Since its inception, the WSAF has provided assistance by funding a number of service requests for West Side Leadership Academy including the following:

In 2017, WSAF answered a request from the **West Side Boys' Basketball Program**, enabling 25 student-athletes to participate in three summer athletic camps held at institutions of higher learning in the region. West Side students were able to attend **the Adidas Shootout held at Bethel College (\$1,192.96 sponsorship) in Mishawaka, Indiana**, where the students competed in multiple basketball games and also toured the college campus. A new basketball team of incoming freshman and sophomores was formed this year and WSAF funding made it possible for them to compete against juniors and seniors in the **Bearcat Shootout (at Wheeler High School in Valparaiso, IN (\$105.56 sponsorship))**. It was the first time for many of these younger athletes to engage with older, more experienced players and many lessons were learned. At the same time, through WSAF financing, West Side's varsity team traveled to **DePaul University in Chicago (\$892.96 sponsorship) for its basketball camp**, which included athletic competition against teams from Michigan and Illinois, film study and discussions with the DePaul coaching staff and even recruitment evaluations for West Side players. Christopher L. Buggs, West Side teacher and boys basketball coach, shared this feedback after the summer programs, "The West Side Boys Basketball Program would like to thank the West Side Alumni Foundation for financially supporting us so that it was possible for our student-athletes to not only develop their basketball skills, but more importantly, get a chance to visit college campuses. The experience was awesome!! Many lessons were learned at the camp(s), how teams work and a belief in one another can propel them to compete against the very best." "We visited various student activity buildings and educational centers...took a tour of their basketball offices and training areas...(held a) 2-hour film study and discussion with our student-athletes...(focused on) issues our players face on the court, in the classroom, and in life. Our guys really locked in on every word from the coach's mouth because of their youth and recent experiences. Our kids

were also evaluated by the... coaches for recruitment purposes. (The experience) also gave our kids a chance to explore parts of Chicago which many of them have never seen. Overall, these experiences helped our students gain information about college, compete against new teams in new environments, and allowed them to continue to develop their team-working skills. We plan on continuing to expand and improve this program next year!”



Source: Christopher L. Buggs



In March, 2017, Robert Briggs, West Side media specialist, received a **\$1,000 award from WSAF to purchase new library books for the school's library**. Based on input from West Side English teachers, a select listing of books was recommended in the topic areas that students needed for their research assignments. According to Mr. Briggs, “We have not been able to order new library books for our students doing research for over four years. We need(ed) new library

books for our students; we have tried to order books from our library funds, but the order was cancelled.”



Source: Robert Briggs

In April and May, 2017, **WSAF provided membership and competition fees to send eight West Students to the 31st Annual Indiana Academic Super Bowl (\$600.00)**; its State Finals were held **at Purdue University, in West Lafayette, Indiana**. West Side Leadership Academy was the only Gary school that participated in this coveted academic competition, competing against 650 students from 96 high schools throughout the state of Indiana. The high school (Senior Division) competition consisted of five subject matter rounds (English, Science, Social Studies, Mathematics, and Fine Arts); some interdisciplinary questions required knowledge of at least two subject areas. Des'Tina A. Paige, West Side art teacher and sponsor for the Academic Super Bowl team said, "Please help me congratulate the Academic Super Bowl team who competed and placed in the following subject areas: Science-3rd place; Social Studies-3rd place; Math-3rd place. We are proud of all of our team members and coaches." She added, "We were the only participating Gary school, so we are quite proud. Special thanks to... the West Side Alumni Foundation for making this event possible."



Source: Des'Tina A. Paige

In April of 2016, West Side Teacher David Freeman and his **Special Education program** participants wanted to take a **field trip to Fair Oaks Farms, Fair Oaks, IN**, but found traveling with students who have severe physical and cognitive disabilities to be challenging. **The WSAF stepped in and funded their transportation (a wheelchair-accessible bus and a 44-passenger bus) for the 33 special needs students and their 10 adult chaperones** for the field experience. Mr. Freeman stated, "As a result of the field trip, our students with disabilities were able to travel to a rural setting and interact with non-disabled individuals." Through a specially-designed educational tour of the pig farm, the students connected with nature, learning that food does not "just come from the store". Additionally, after the farm visit, the students with disabilities were able to practice proper eating etiquette in a community setting with non-disabled students, as they enjoyed fresh foods from the farms and participated in the presentation of the processing of food. He added, "We thank you again for your support. Our students would not have been afforded this opportunity without your help."

In June of 2016, **WSAF funding enabled 30 students (\$1,000.00)** who participated in West Side's Junior Varsity and Varsity basketball programs, led by Basketball Coach Christopher L. Buggs, to participate in the **DePaul University Summer Basketball Camp** held at Wheeler High School in Valparaiso, IN and the **DePaul University Men's Basketball Team Shoot-Out 2016** in Chicago, IL. The WSAF donation funded team skill instruction, team camp uniforms and participation in highly-competitive games with teams from all over the Chicago-land area. According to Coach Buggs, following the camp experiences, two of the participating student-players received college athletic/academic scholarships: Jeffrey Townsend, a West Side graduate with honors signed an athletic/academic scholarship with Holy Cross College. The scholarship is worth over \$120,000.00! Additionally, Tim Harris was selected as an Indiana Basketball Coaches Association Sportsman of the Year, as well as being selected to play in the "Circle of Men Athletics" all star game. Tim, also an honor graduate, won several academic awards (including a 2017 Lugar scholarship), in addition to finishing third in his graduating class. He is attending Rose-Hulman College with plans to major in biochemistry. Congratulations!

The WSAF mission: To provide funding, support and lasting solutions for the students of West Side Leadership Academy that will strengthen their academic, athletic, and social experiences.

The needs are great and help is still needed to achieve WSAF goals. Want to make a tax-deductible donation to WSAF?

Ways to give:

- The website address is: <http://westsidealumnifoundation.org/>. Visit the WSAF website for more information: westsidealumnifoundation.org
- Credit Card Donations: WestSideAlumniFoundation.org > Select 'Giving' > 'Contributions'
- Interested parties can also contact Foundation members via the email address: Info@WestSideAlumniFoundation.org or phone: (219) 237-0687