



ATF News

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ATF AND THE DETROIT TIGERS TEAM UP FOR KIDS' SAKE

DETROIT – A Detroit kid from a tough east side neighborhood who rose to the senior ranks of federal law enforcement will return home May 19 to throw out the first pitch in the game between the Detroit Tigers and Tampa Bay Devil Rays and to mark the 11-year partnership between the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and the Tigers in combating violence and gangs.

W. Larry Ford, who grew up in Detroit's tough Harper and Van Dyke neighborhood and now serves as ATF assistant director for public and governmental affairs, will take the mound as the Tigers' honored guest for this year's "Tiger G.R.E.A.T. Day" event.

The Tigers dedicate one game a year to the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program on behalf of all Michigan kids who are students or recent graduates of the outreach program.

For Ford, who graduated from Charles F. Kettering High School and the University of Toledo, the chance to pitch in Comerica Park is a trip down memory lane.

"I had to make my way through gang violence to get to middle school when I was a kid in Harper and Van Dyke," Ford said. "I hope my story and my being here today help other kids throughout Michigan know that they can make it, too."

In addition to Ford and Special Agent in Charge Valerie J. Goddard of ATF's Detroit Field Division, ATF's invited guests include U.S. Attorney Stephen Murphy (Eastern Judicial District of Michigan), Brownstown Police Chief Dan Grant, Detroit Police Chief Ella Bully-Cummings, and Macomb County Sheriff Mark Hackel.

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The annual game is the Tigers' way of supporting the students and their achievements, and helping them to complete their studies under G.R.E.A.T., in which they pledge to be responsible members of their communities.

More than 1, 600 kids from the areas surrounding the communities of Brownstown Township, Detroit and Mount Clemens will be guests of the Tigers. They will wear their G.R.E.A.T. "colors" in honor of their effort to avoid gangs and youth violence. School administrators, teachers and parent volunteers will chaperone the kids.

With the support and guidance of specially trained law enforcement officers, the students develop beliefs and practice behaviors that will help them avoid destructive behaviors. They learn to set goals, resist pressures, resolve conflicts, understand how gangs impact the quality of their life, and the importance of becoming responsible members of their communities. The 13-week G.R.E.A.T. curriculum is available to students at the middle school level.

The goals of G.R.E.A.T. include:

- Reduce the incidence of violent youth crime
- Resolve conflicts without resorting to violence
- Provide youth with skills to make sound choices
- Provide activities for G.R.E.A.T. graduates during summer months
- Involve teachers, parents, and communities.
- Teach youth to recognize indicators of gang involvement in their communities.

ATF developed and implemented the G.R.E.A.T. program with the Phoenix, Ariz., Police Department in 1991 to deter youthful violence and crime by reducing involvement in gangs. ATF currently has numerous partnerships with local and state agencies, as well as the Boys and Girls Club of America and the Police Athletic League.

Since the programs inception in 1991, more than 67,700 Michigan kids have received instruction from city, county, state and federal law enforcement officers throughout the state. Nationwide, more than four million children have been through the program. To date, about 7,000 officers from more than 2,000 agencies representing 50 states, the District of Columbia, Canada, Guam, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Bermuda and military personnel from overseas bases have trained to present the G.R.E.A.T. curriculum in elementary and middle school classrooms.

Note to editors: Media interested in an interview with ATF AD Larry Ford, ATF SAC Goddard or any of the other agency representatives regarding the Tiger G.R.E.A.T. game and the G.R.E.A.T. Program should contact ATF PIO Vera Fedorak, (313) 647-1885 (cellular phone).

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