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News Release

Sheriff PAL Program pivots and partners during pandemic to raise funds for local youth

January 26, 2021, OAKLAND COUNTY, MI. – In the spring of 2020, the Oakland County Sheriff PAL (Police Athletic League), which partners law enforcement and members of the community to empower young people through athletics, mentoring, and enrichment programs, held a returnable drive. The drive, which was organized with the help of the Oakland County Sheriff's Office, McKenzie Moving, and Oakland County Parks and Recreation, was successful in collecting more than 100,000 bottles and cans, but restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic meant that they would need to be stored until return machines were back online. Stores are now accepting the recyclables, but because return lines can often be long, Sheriff PAL volunteers needed help ensuring they could safely earn the much-needed deposit funds.

That's where a little help from a couple community partners, including a well-known grocer, came in.

Powers Distributing, a local beer consulting company, was able to help process a majority of the cans and bottles, but about 40,000 still needed to be returned. After being contacted by Oakland County Commissioner **Angela Powell** (D-Pontiac), the Royal Oak Woodward Corner Market Meijer location quickly offered to set aside time over the course of two weeks to allow volunteers to return the cans and bottles. Although there is usually a \$25 daily limit on returns, the store allowed the organization to return dozens of bags each day.

"Meijer is committed to supporting the communities we serve and are pleased to partner with the Oakland County Sheriff PAL to ensure their fundraiser was a success," Natalie Rubino, manager of the Woodward Corner Market Store, said. "This has been a challenging year, but the hard work of this great organization has not gone unnoticed."

Through the bottle and can drive, Sheriff PAL raised more than \$10,000.

“We are grateful to the members of the community who donated their bottles and cans to the Sheriff PAL drive,” said Oakland County Sheriff Michael J. Bouchard. “The response was overwhelming, and the funds raised will help to provide much needed youth programs to those who need them most. Also, thanks to Powers Distributing, Meijer, McKenzie Moving, and Oakland County Parks for all of their assistance with the drive.”

In late 2020, Sheriff PAL received a \$10,000 grant from the county’s Non-Profit COVID-19 Economic Impact Grant program, however fundraising during the pandemic has been challenging. Like most non-profits during this time, Sheriff PAL has had to get creative to raise money for programming, as its regular fundraising events have been canceled.

“Sheriff PAL has a long history of mentoring young people and providing important activities that enrich the lives of the participants while improving our communities,” Oakland County Executive David Coulter said. “I applaud PAL on its mission, Commissioner Powell for her leadership, donors for their support, and Meijer for accepting this sizeable collection of returnable containers.”

During the pandemic, Sheriff PAL has been offering virtual opportunities for recreation, including online sports practices, family bootcamp fitness classes and even a holiday dance party. In addition, the organization has expanded its free tutoring to help students, especially as they adapt to online learning. Sheriff PAL has also partnered with the COVID Response Network, which has helped deliver more than 700,000 meals to families in need since April.

“I love working with Sheriff PAL because it is a bright spot for many young people in Pontiac and the surrounding area,” Powell said. “They have done so much for families during the pandemic, and I’m glad to have been able to help connect them with resources so that they can continue to serve those in need.”

The Sheriff PAL program is a 501c3 organization founded by Sheriff Bouchard in 2015. Sheriff PAL is a dynamic collaboration between the Oakland County Sheriff’s Office, the Oakland County Health Division, the Healthy Pontiac, We Can! coalition, Oakland University, Woodside Bible Church and Dream Center of Pontiac, the City of Pontiac, and other faith-based and/or community partners. For more information, please visit www.sheriffpal.com.

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