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**WINDY CITY HOOPS BASKETBALL NEARS FUNDRAISING GOAL AND HAS ENOUGH RESOURCES
TO BEGIN PLAY IN TWO WEEKS**

*\$377,000 Collected to Date Thanks to Large Contributions by Sammons Financial Group and the Gardner Family Foundation and \$37,000 in Small Donations;
Special \$25,000 Match Campaign Announced as Final Push Begun Toward Goal*

Today Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Chicago Park District Superintendent Michael Kelly, and the Chicago Parks Foundation announced that Windy City Hoops, a crowd-sourced basketball program targeted at providing at-risk youth a safe and productive option for their free time, has had a successful first three weeks of fundraising and has raised enough resources to start the program at the end of the month.

"There is nothing more important than providing safe, productive options for our young people," said Mayor Emanuel. "The Chicago Park District's Windy City Hoops is a wonderful way for all Chicagoans to come together and provide opportunity for some of our most at-risk youth."

To date, the program has raised \$37,000 in online donations from 327 donors. The average donation amount is \$115. Additionally, two donors have donated \$340,000 to the fund. This is more than enough to fund the program for three seasons, and play will begin later in March.

A creative program has been put in place to get over the finish line. The Sammons Financial Group (SFG), which donated \$215,000 to the effort on its first day, has agreed to give an additional \$25,000 if the public commits \$25,000 in online donations between today and March 20.

"Violence is a serious issue in the city of Chicago," said Steve Palmitier, President and Chief Operating Officer of SFG. "We need more programs like this to provide at-risk teens with a safe environment. We are happy that as an organization, we can make a contribution to our community—particularly for the safety of our youth."

Sammons Financial Group (SFG) is a holding company made up of several successful financial

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services "member companies" who offer a variety of financial and retirement products through multiple distribution channels. SFG member companies are North American Company for Life and Health Insurance®, Midland National Life Insurance Company, including its divisions, Sammons Annuity Group and Sammons Corporate Markets Group, Sammons Securities Company®, LLC., Sammons Retirement Solutions, Inc.SM, and Sammons Financial Network, LLCSM.

Additionally, the Gardner Family Foundation has donated \$125,000 to the fundraising drive.

Mayor Emanuel and the Chicago Parks Foundation enlisted support of all Chicagoans to fund the program's expansion. Anyone can visit cityofchicago.org/hoops and make a donation to support the purchase of a jersey, pay a referee for a game, reserve a court or support another part of the program. The \$480,000 goal will allow all Chicagoans to help create new teen basketball leagues at 10 parks that will open up an additional 3,200 registration slots for at-risk youth ages 13-17 year-round. The leagues will operate from 7-10pm on Fridays and 5-10pm on Saturdays, a substantial expansion that will double the total number of hours of teen basketball programming provided by the Park District year-round.

The 10 parks are spread across eight community areas and were chosen according to high crime levels, low median income, and regional influence of the park facility:

Loyola (Rogers Park)
Amundsen (Austin)
Columbus (Austin)
Garfield (East Garfield)
Franklin (North Lawndale)
Kennicott (Kenwood)
Jackson (Woodlawn)
Ogden (Englewood)
Hamilton (Englewood)
Fernwood (Roseland)

The year round league will start in March. The Chicago Park District's program is an expansion of a youth and young adult basketball program aimed at enhancing neighborhood safety, engaging at-risk young adults, and reducing illegal gang activity in targeted neighborhoods. Last summer, 3,000 kids registered in Park District teen basketball leagues. Over the past year, the Park District has received close to 15,000 total registrations in its basketball programs - including open gym, leagues, instructional programs, and camps."

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