



15-LOVE Unveils New Tennis Courts

On a beautiful, but chilly November day, 15-LOVE held a ribbon cutting to open the new and improved tennis courts at the Michigan Avenue site in Schenectady. 15-LOVE participants and Schenectady Mayor, Gary McCarthy, were on hand to cut the ribbon to unveil the new courts in the Mont Pleasant neighborhood. The 15-LOVE family was joined by donors, board members, local media and neighbors for this special day. After the ribbon cutting, kids scattered onto the courts and started playing immediately. They all raved about how amazing the courts were and one six year old was overheard saying “Mom look at these small courts they were made just for me!”

The tennis courts at Michigan Avenue used to be 15-LOVE’s largest site in the City of Schenectady. Unfortunately, the courts were in significant disrepair and virtually unplayable. With the support of local corporations, community leaders, and the City of Schenectady, \$300,000 was raised to transform the pre-existing ten courts into eight 78’ courts with 60’ blended lines. The remaining two courts were transformed into six 36’ courts for kids 10 and Under.

Additional improvements that were made to the facility included: removing the current asphalt, grading and paving the courts, removing the surrounding trees and fencing and installing new fencing, adding accessible gates, adding 8 courtmaster championship grade, double tennis nets and six courtmaster 10 and Under tennis nets and adding a fenced-in area to house portable restrooms during the summer.

This May, 15-LOVE participants joined the Mont Pleasant Neighborhood Association and spent a beautiful Saturday morning cleaning the area surrounding the new tennis courts. 15-LOVE will be working with Re-Tree Schenectady to plant new trees in the area as well and we look forward to kick starting our outdoor programs at Michigan Avenue!



15-LOVE Graduates

Congratulations to the Class of 2013!

Albany High School

Sadiqullah Safi will be attending Hudson Valley Community College pursuing a degree in Liberal Arts.

Bethlehem High School

Josh Dubey will be attending the University of Delaware where he plans to major in Chemical Engineering.

Shaker High School

Sidney Ling will be attending Clarkson University where he plans to major in Engineering.

Schenectady High School

Rachel Fields will be attending Union College and plans to earn her degree in Biology.

Drexel University

Nithin Raiker earned his MBA and currently works as a Product Manager at SABIC in Philadelphia.

Siena College

Jasmine Horton earned her Masters degree in Accounting and accepted a position as an Auditor with PricewaterhouseCoopers in Albany.

Syracuse University

Khadijah Peek earned her degree in Communications and Rhetorical Studies and minored in Marketing. Khadijah will be attending Syracuse Law School in the fall.

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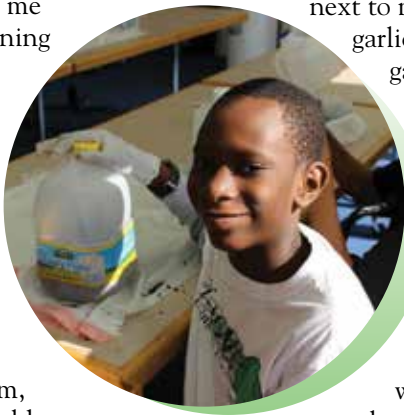


FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



I love the spring! It's so exciting to see new life sprouting, colors brightening and moods lifted by sunny days. This spring, we've had new things to look forward to and it is just a testament to the amazing year we've had!

I had the opportunity to rent a portable toilet for the summer for the first time. That may not sound exciting to most people, but it was thrilling for me because it meant we were opening up the new tennis courts at Michigan Avenue Park in Schenectady for play! The Schenectady High School team played a couple of their home matches there. Recently, while our kids were volunteering at a neighborhood clean up day around the park, Mish, who plays on the high school team, couldn't stop smiling as he told me that they had played their first match on the courts and how amazing it was. What a rewarding conversation. He was especially excited because he knows that he helped make those courts a reality – along with Curtis, another Schenectady participant, he went with us and spoke to the County Legislators, he was featured in a Schenectady Gazette



article about the courts, and he helped the Mayor cut the ribbon at the opening in November. For an 8th grader, that is all super exciting, and he was magical. We didn't "prep" him at all or give him a list of things to say – we just asked the boys to speak about their experiences from the heart, and they did. Mish and Curtis helped make those courts happen, and along with their high school team, they were the first ones to actually play on those courts. It was unplanned, but absolutely fitting.

I've also been able to peek out the door next to my office to see garlic sprouting in our garden. Katie and I joined a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) last year with Fox Creek Farms, and as I was having a conversation with the farmer about our garden at the office, he gave me a bunch of garlic (their only cash crop) to plant and told me how to care for it. We planted it in the Fall, worried that the squirrels digging in that bed were eating it, but watched it all sprout this Spring and it has been so much fun to watch. One of our Board members, Barbara Yake, came into our office during the

February break and worked with the kids for two days on winter sowing. A technique I had never even heard of, but we have a long row of milk jugs outside in our garden that have also sprouted this spring. It is probably time to bring the kids back in to transplant those seedlings, but they have enjoyed peeking into their jugs to see if there is any action, and seem amazed that these once snow-covered milk jugs are now filled with green life!

The garden and the Michigan Avenue Park project have been two of my all-time favorite projects at 15-LOVE. They were a lot of work last year, and this spring, I am having the opportunity to watch new life sprouting out of both of those projects. It is amazing and rewarding. I want to thank so many of you who have supported and continue to support those projects and 15-LOVE as a whole. Your support, even if it is just by educating yourself about 15-LOVE by reading this newsletter, has brought new life this spring. I hope you will have the opportunity to drive by those tennis courts on Schuyler Street in Schenectady or come to our office and peek at the garden to see the new life that this spring has brought and your support has made possible!

With kind regards,

Amber Marino

Amber Marino

15-LOVE WISH LIST

Do you have a basement full of unused books or a shed of garden supplies you never use and are looking to make a donation? If so, 15-LOVE is always looking for small donations to help with our ongoing programs, check out our wish list below....

- New or used children's books (board books to novels)
- Gardening supplies
- Vegetable / herb plants for the garden (bought a 6 pack, but only want 4 plants? We'll take the other 2!)
- School supplies: packs of paper, notebooks, folders, highlighters, pens, crayons, colored pencils, pencil sharpeners, glue, glue sticks
- Folding tables & chairs
- Paper products (napkins, plates, bowls, cups, paper towels, toilet paper)
- Plastic forks, knives, spoons, cups
- New or used tennis rackets or tennis supplies
- Small workout supplies (jump ropes, resistance bands, steps, etc...)

15-LOVE

Participant Q & A

Swetha Thiagarajan Age – 14
School – Troy High School

How did you become involved with 15-LOVE?

I became involved with 15-LOVE when I was very young. I first started playing tennis with 15-LOVE during the summer program. As I continued going every summer, I was selected for the 15-LOVE Excellence Program.

What other activities are you involved in besides 15-LOVE?

I play the piano; I'm involved in my school's jazz ensemble, band, and chorus. I also participate in a science program, and Odyssey of the Mind.

What is your favorite part of being involved with 15-LOVE?

I enjoy learning tennis and being involved with an organization that helps the community.

What have you improved on the most since being involved in 15-LOVE?

My leadership skills have improved and I communicate better with others. My confidence has increased and I have also gained the ability to manage my time more efficiently (between school work and sports).



Swetha Thiagarajan

Who is your favorite pro-tennis player and why?

My favorite pro-tennis player is Serena Williams because she is the only player to have achieved a Career Golden Slam in both singles and doubles. She is also currently ranked No.1 in women's singles tennis.

If you could go to any college or university where would it be and why?

I would like to go to Harvard University because it is my dream to attend this college.

It is an amazing college and it offers the programs I would like to study. I believe that I can gain invaluable experiences from some of the best professors.

What would you like to do when you grow up?

I would like to pursue a career in biomedical engineering or become a doctor when I grow up.

What advice would you give to any new 15-LOVE participant?

I would advise them to attend consistently and to use this opportunity wisely.

Game, Set, Match!

15-LOVE's 18 & Under USTA team went 13-1 in league play during the indoor season and finished in the standings tied with one other team for 1st place! Congratulations go out to all of our players and to alumnae Ryan Artis and James Fowler for their time and dedication to coaching 15-LOVE's tournament team.



15-LOVE's 18 & Under USTA Team with Coaches Ryan Artis and James Fowler.

15-LOVE Earns Top Award

This January, 15-LOVE was honored to receive the USTA Eastern Member Organization of the Year Award. The award was given out at the annual USTA Eastern Meeting & Award Dinner in Westchester, NY. On hand to accept this great award was 15-LOVE Executive Director, Amber Marino, Board Member, Robert Schmitz and 15-LOVE participant Curtis Farmer and alumnae Clinton Mathai.

My Year at 15-LOVE



By: *Ruchi Gala*

This year I had the opportunity to volunteer as a Siena College AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteer in Service to America) Fellow at 15-LOVE. My time here has taught me a lot and has been a memorable one. I graduated from Stony Brook University in May, 2012 and moved to Albany in July, which was a transition for me. But 15-LOVE's warm, welcoming environment allowed me to feel comfortable. The moment I joined 15-LOVE, I was welcomed with open arms and never felt that I was an outsider.

This past year I have been working with various aspects in the 15-LOVE program. In the beginning of my term, with the help of Amber and Katie, I organized a free book giveaway day in our 15-LOVE office. I designed and packaged close to 7,000 fliers to distribute to the elementary schools in the Albany City School District. Nearly 250 people walked through our doors and we heard parents talking about how great it was. We all know how expensive books can be and it was great that so many kids were taking advantage of this great opportunity! Since then, we have received a lot of donated books and hosted another free book giveaway on Wednesday, May 15.

I have also been responsible for organizing healthy cooking events and gardening activities for the 15-LOVE kids. In February, we had one of our board members, Barbara Yake, come in with other community volunteers

and teach the kids about winter sowing. The kids had a great time learning about this new technique of gardening and will be coming back in June to plant their vegetables/herbs in the 15-LOVE garden. They will also be coming in the office this summer to do different activities involving the garden, such as creating fun signs for the garden and making snacks involving ingredients from the garden.

The kids have also enjoyed some healthy cooking events I organized for them the past couple of months. We were lucky to have one of our board members, Nuhar Jaleel, come and do a demonstration on vegetarian chili. The families were able to enjoy hearty and warm chili and learn how to cook different recipes in a slow cooker. The past month, I partnered with a local café owner, Sarah Fish, from The Hungry Fish Café in Troy. She came and did an activity involving apples. She made various recipes such as apple sauce, apple chips, apple and goat cheese sandwich, and baked apples for the kids. Although, not many were a big fan of the goat cheese, everyone gobbled up everything else! This summer, Genny Pauley, from Cornell Cooperative Extension, will be coming to do a great training with our summer 15-LOVE instructors on healthy snacks and activities for the summer program. She will also be doing a garden activity with the kids in June.

The past nine months I have had a great opportunity to supervise an intern from Albany High School. I was able to learn a lot on how to supervise her through our environment here at 15-LOVE. Never having supervised anyone, at the beginning I found it difficult, but as time went on, I created tasks for her which would allow her to learn and grow as I am doing here at 15-LOVE. I have been able to develop a great work relationship with her and enjoy having her as our intern.

With three months left of my service term, I look forward to planning and executing our Summer Book Giveaway. After I leave in July, I will be pursuing my Doctorate in Pediatric Physical Therapy. Even though my service year will be over shortly, I plan to come back to 15-LOVE and giving back when I am in the Albany area.



College Prep and Leadership Training Program Wrap Up

By: Maxine Brisport, 15-LOVE Education Director

This fall the focus in our College Prep Program was on the college application process for our high school seniors. We created group presentations and activities in an effort to engage all students in the college prep program (regardless of grade level) as a technique to help increase their readiness for the process of applying to college. We held several classes devoted to the process of securing scholarships and applying for Financial Aid. We are so incredibly proud to report that all of our graduating high school seniors were accepted into the college(s) of their choice! You can see who are high school graduates are and where they plan to attend college on page 1. This year during the College Prep Program we conducted many virtual tours of colleges and universities. Specifically, we researched colleges via the internet in an effort to find the best fit for each student's interest and career goals. We also had a guest speaker, Mr. Tom Briggs, a 2012 college graduate, who currently works at the New York State Assembly. Mr. Briggs gave advice and shared words of encouragement. He stated, "I would advise incoming freshmen to get involved. This is a great way to meet friends. College is very stressful and you need someone who can relate to you."

Our Leadership Training Program included a community service project that was initiated and completed by the

students. The students decided to collect non-perishable food items, which was donated to a local food bank during the holiday season. The students also took action in the form of becoming advocates for their local school districts by writing personal letters to their local elected Assembly Representative and State Senators. The goal of their letters was to obtain equity in funding local school districts. For example, one student expressed concern regarding the dwindling budget for his high school varsity tennis team, which has resulted in the inability to purchase new uniforms or new tennis balls. Another student showed concern regarding losing teachers in the area of Art. She also pleaded to maintain a lower student teacher ratio. She wrote, "In my math class, there are around thirty students. The whole room is full and it is sometimes hard to see the board." It was apparent that each student understood the role of advocacy on behalf of their schools and community. Our annual Leadership Weekend Retreat was held May 17-19, you will hear more about the retreat in the fall newsletter.

The students in the Leadership Training Program will be holding a car wash fundraiser at the 15-LOVE office on Saturday, June 1. If you are in the area and your car needs a sprucing up, please stop by from 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Participants Work with Local College Athletes

Throughout the fall and winter, 15-LOVE participants had the opportunity to work with three of our local college tennis teams and see firsthand what it takes to play sports at the intercollegiate level. First stop was at the University at Albany, where participants worked with the Women's Tennis Team and UAlbany Tennis Coach Gordon Graham. Coach Graham and the tennis team gave the 15-LOVE participants an opportunity to participate in a full college practice, which the participants loved! The tennis team then took participants on a tour of the UAlbany campus and gave them a glance at a day in the life of a college athlete.

Next stop was a day of tennis with Skidmore's College Men's tennis team, held at Lincoln Park in Albany. Our participants took part in tennis activities on six courts, each court including live ball games and drills. Members of the Skidmore tennis team then worked with our high school players on various game strategies to apply to their upcoming high school season.

15-LOVE participants then enjoyed a day with the RPI's men's tennis team. The participants took part in various fun tennis games and drills that helped them set up and finish off points during matches.

With each college stop our participants were able to learn different tennis strategies and see how a college team truly works together. They also connected with many of the college athletes and took what they learned and applied it to their upcoming tennis matches.



15-LOVE participants with members of Skidmore's Men's Tennis Team

'Like' 15-LOVE on Facebook

See the happenings of 15-LOVE, check up on upcoming events and enjoy pictures from participant outings and so much more!

It's simple, simply type in **15-LOVE** in the search box and look for the one that says Non-Profit Organization. Once you double click on that link, our page will appear. Hit the Like button and you're all set!

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FORE LOVE & MONEY

Save the Date

MONDAY JUNE 10, 2013

SCHUYLER MEADOWS CLUB
LOUDONVILLE, NY

A GOLF AND TENNIS OUTING TO BENEFIT THE
15-LOVE PROGRAM

FOR SPONSORSHIP INFORMATION OR MORE DETAILS,
CALL THE 15-LOVE OFFICE AT 438-2039.

*Lunch, Tennis, Golf, Dinner,
Silent Auction and More...*