

# Best of Young DETROIT



## S.A.Y. Detroit Play Center trains youth to be winners in life

**A neighborhood jewel:** Activities, including sports, music and dance are always on the menu at the S.A.Y. Detroit Play Center, but learning and academics come first.



## Community needs are served by refurbished facility with a master plan

By Scott Talley

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During the fall sports season, which has already kicked off with youth and high school football, fans across our community will be paying close attention to numbers. Along with the scores from games, fans love to devour statistics, such as passing, rushing and receiving yardage, as well as touchdowns scored. The young people that rack up these numbers often become stars in their neighborhoods and schools.

However, there are some different numbers that are far more important to the development of our youth and the advancement of our community. And with the help of the S.A.Y. Detroit Play Center, more young people are paying attention to these numbers, which is great news for our city.

"Our mission is to develop great readers and great people," said Mike Tenbusch, executive director of S.A.Y. Detroit Play Center, which asks youth that regularly use the facility to make a serious commitment to obtaining a minimum 3.0 grade point average. "We want to be the premier training center for young people to improve their community starting with themselves."

When Tenbusch talks about his organization's mission and vision, it sounds like he is speaking from the heart, which is not surprising given that he has a long history of helping Detroit youth including being the co-founder of Think Detroit, which later merged with the Detroit Police Athletic League.

Located at 19320 Van Dyke, in what used to be the shuttered Lipke Recreation Center, the S.A.Y. Detroit Play Center addresses the needs of youth and parents in a very proud northeast Detroit neighborhood.

"It's a very loving community and just a beautiful place to be," said Tenbusch, who also is the author of "The Jonathan Effect: Helping Kids and Schools Win the Battle Against Poverty."

More than a beautiful building that offers sports and fitness, robotics and a state-of-the-art recording studio, the Center has an overall master plan that has already made a significant impact in the lives of hundreds of youth in just two years. To support the emphasis on education, students are asked to study for at least an hour in the "Deep," the name given to a 7,000 square foot digital learning center within the facility, before doing anything else at the center. Report cards also are collected and relationships are made with neighboring schools to support ongoing academic progress, and to give students ownership of their futures, young members of the Center are asked to set and achieve school and life goals.

Tenbusch describes the center as "the perfect combination of people, partners and vision." And the partners include special people that have proven to be champions for Detroit youth through their actions. They include award winning sports columnist, author, screenwriter and philanthropist Mitch Albom, who founded the nonprofit S.A.Y. (Super All Year) Detroit in 2006; Detroit Lions quarterback Matthew Stafford, who also has shown that he has a caring heart as big as his golden arm; and Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan, who played a critical role in ensuring the building that housed the Lipke Recreation



Center would continue to serve Detroit youth.

Other members of the S.A.Y. Detroit Play Center family may not have quite the same star power behind their names but they are no less important, including Derrick Hayes, the pride of Southwestern High School who once helped the University of Detroit Mercy shock the college basketball world when the Titans knocked off St. John's University in the 1998 NCAA Tournament. Hayes now scores big on behalf of Detroit youth as S.A.Y. Detroit Play Center's director of Culture and Partnership.

The "Best of Young Detroit" was delighted to see Hayes surrounded by youth following a recent big day of activities. That Saturday we also learned that the S.A.Y. Detroit Play Center and youth across our city have a gentleman named Thomas Smith on their side.

"It's all about the kids," proclaimed Smith, president of the S.A.Y. Detroit Warriors football organization. "I've always wanted to do something for the community and give back to the city of Detroit."

On the day (Aug. 26) Smith made those comments, something good indeed had just occurred as the sparkling Matthew Stafford Field at S.A.Y. Detroit Play Center hosted a special day of football and cheerleading, which also promoted fellowship across our community and state.

"Everybody had fun," said Smith, whose 13-year-old son Treveon was one of the more than 900 boys and girls (ages 5-14) that participated. "We had kids from as far away as Grand Rapids come down and play the east and west side of Detroit. We also had our cheer team and different cheer teams from around the state of Michigan perform during each game, so it was just a great day."



Following the games, a few participants told the "Best of Young Detroit" how the S.A.Y. Detroit Play Center has positively impacted their lives. We wish all of the young people that visit the Center continued success, and working with the S.A.Y. Detroit Play Center staff and family, the "Best of Young Detroit" looks forward to reporting on center activities throughout the upcoming school year.

**Bynasha Binion, ninth grader, Fitzgerald High School:** "The Center is a great place to come, do homework, be a part of activities, and they feed you too. It's mainly about coming together and building a family—we all lift each other up and don't bring anyone down."

**Lundon Binion, seventh grader, Legacy Academy:** "What I like about the Center is how we can learn new things like doing jumps (cheerleading)."

**Azaria Bolden, fourth grader, Mason Academy:** "The thing I like most about the

Center is that we cheer, have fun, and learn stuff."

**Troy West, eighth grader, Commonwealth Community Development Academy, also plays fullback, outside linebacker and cornerback for the S.A.Y. Detroit Warriors:** "I like everything about the Center. Matthew Stafford came in and helped us because all we had was grass and he made us a football field, which was a good thing. I also like the staff members and everything that is going on—I just like to be here."

