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Hip-Hop Chess gets kids thinking, off streets

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GRAND RAPIDS -- To keep inner-city kids off the streets, parents and mentors are taking action, providing summer activities for the city's youth.

So far this month, Grand Rapids has had seven reports of people shot. In June 2006, there were 18 shootings. The city is trying to prevent this violence by offering young people a positive alternative.

Saturday, kids got a chance to settle the score with an opponent using their minds, with a face-to-face strategy where no one gets hurt. Called hip-hop chess, young people gathered at Grand Rapids park after Darlene King came up with idea. King was tired of seeing senseless teen shootings, like the slaying of Kenneth Dear.

"That, to me, was so unnecessary because those boys could have fought a different way," King said.

After learning the history of the game of chess and a few lessons on its rules, the participating teens were hooked, all while learning critical thinking, strategy and patience.

Hip-hop chess player Curtis Dougherty said, "And then you learn a little about your opponent. What they are...how smart they are."

Around the corner from the afternoon tournament, a few dozen teens and their mentors were taking social action by cleaning up the Baxter neighborhood.

"You want to make your community look nice, right? So why let it clutter up?" asked Corinthia Croom of Mizizi Maji Mentoring Program.

Teens involved in the mentoring program told 24 Hour News 8 that there is plenty for local teens to do, but young people must look in the right places and steer clear of negative forces.

Other Grand Rapids teens were in life guard training at Briggs Pool on Saturday afternoon.

In 2006, only three of the city's six pools opened due to budget cuts. This summer, with the help of private funding, all six pools will open on Monday.

"For those who are 10 and over they've got a place they can come all summer long and do something creative, that's positive in the community," said Grand Rapids Aquatic Supervisor Joe Sutherlin. "To get to meet people, have fun, be safe, feel safe and that's huge."

Parents and children are invited to join the hip-hop chess tournament every Saturday at M.L.K. Park at 1pm.

Pool Locations

- Briggs Pool, Lafayette & Knapp, NE
- Highland Pool, Grand & Capen, NE
- M.L. King, Jr. Pool, Fuller & Alexander, SE
- Campau Pool, S. Division & Delaware, SE
- Lincoln Pool, Bridge & Marion, NW
- Richmond Pool, Richmond & Tamarack, NW

Pool Hours

- Monday-Saturday: 12pm - 4pm & 5:30pm - 8pm
- Sundays and July 4: 12:30pm - 4pm



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