



Tuskegee Airmen Field Project Will Make Sumner the First Public High School in St. Louis To Play Home Football Games on Synthetic Turf

ST. LOUIS, April 30 /PRNewswire/ -- Charles E. Sumner High School in St. Louis, MO, is accustomed to being first. That tradition grew on Monday, April 27th when the first all black high school west of the Mississippi River, broke ground on a new football and soccer facility: Tuskegee Airmen Field.

Sprinturf will produce and install one of its premium dual-fiber products, Sprinturf Ultrablade(TM) DF at the site in historic Tandy Park. The Sprinturf field makes Sumner the first public high school in St. Louis to play home football games on synthetic turf. In fact, Sprinturf will allow Sumner's football team to play on a field it can truly call home for the first time ever when the 2009 season kicks off on August 30th.

Tuskegee Airmen Field is being paid for through a group organized by PHL, Inc. (Public High League, Inc.), a non-profit organization dedicated to improving athletic facilities used by public high schools in the city of St. Louis. Through PHL, Inc. both the Anheuser-Busch Foundation and the St. Louis Rams have made generous contributions toward this project. PHL, Inc. President, Thom Kuhn said, "After looking at a number of fields in the area, we feel we got a great value with Sprinturf and have received the best product on the market at a fair price. These children and this community deserve nothing less."

"We are honored to be working with PHL and the tremendous people who dedicate their time and service to the student-athletes in the St. Louis area," commented Stanley H. Greene, president and CEO of Sprinturf. "We want to help the members of this community be safe, both on and off the field. The addition of this Sprinturf field with an all-rubber infill system now ensures a safe environment for these children to play as well as a significant increase in the availability of the field, enabling even more participation by the students. Evidence has shown that children who are involved in athletics are less likely to drop out of school and more likely to go on to college."

"PHL, Inc. has been a blessing to the kids here in the city," according to Sumner's Head Football Coach, Sorrell Harvey. To date, PHL has spent \$1.25 million fixing and creating facilities for high school athletes in St. Louis.

Tuskegee Airmen Field is the eighth field PHL, Inc. is rebuilding in its four years, but it's the first to use synthetic turf. The Tandy Park project will be the largest single project PHL, Inc. has begun. Synthetic turf was chosen for this project because constant use is one of the goals for the site in Tandy Park, located in a St. Louis neighborhood called The Ville, just northwest of downtown. Coupled with the significantly reduced maintenance costs as compared to natural grass, it made financial sense.

Sumner High is across the street from Tandy Park. Its athletic teams have traditionally practiced there but "home" games were usually played on fields they either "borrowed from" or shared with other schools.

The new multi-use field will now be home to the Sumner High School football and soccer teams, but the larger project in Tandy Park is aimed at drawing together all of the residents in The Ville.

"When PHL came to me about doing the field, I didn't just want it to be a football field. In the community, that area is the only green space we have," said Fourth Ward Alderman Samuel Moore, a former youth softball coach, who is making sure the baseball and softball fields are improved as well.

Moore is credited with suggesting to pay homage to the Tuskegee Airmen by naming the new field after them, "These are people that we are absolutely proud of. Wendell Pruitt was the ace of the Tuskegee Airmen and he went to Sumner." In fact, 34 of the airmen graced the halls of Sumner High according to the Tuskegee Airmen St. Louis chapter.

Pruitt was the pride of the Tuskegee Airmen, the first African-American military airmen and the only African-American airmen to see combat duty in World War II. He flew 70 missions in Europe. He was credited with shooting down three German planes and destroying eight more on the ground. He also assisted in sinking a Nazi destroyer. He died in a 1945 crash while training future pilots. Pruitt is featured prominently in a mural depicting the Tuskegee Airmen at Lambert Field in St. Louis.

"Like everyone else I was late to learn about the Tuskegee Airmen," says Moore. "A lot of people didn't even know any of the Tuskegee Airmen had attended Sumner. That history needs to be brought out and exposed. The way they succeeded to become some of the greatest pilots ever needs to be recognized all over the world." Earlier this year, more than 180 Airmen accepted personal invitations from President Barack Obama to attend the inauguration ceremony in January.

"We're really excited about the new Sprinturf that will be on Tuskegee Airmen Field. It's going to be a place for a lot of teams and organizations that never had a facility to use. It's not only a football field, it's going to bring people together," commented Coach Harvey.

The Tandy Park project by PHL, Inc. will include more than Tuskegee Airmen Field. The 42-hundred block of Kennerly Avenue will also be renamed Tuskegee Airmen Avenue. There are plans to renovate the Tandy Community Center and the tennis courts will be named after Sumner High School graduate Arthur Ashe.

Ashe, Pruitt, Moore and Harvey are the only a few of the distinguished people who have attended Sumner High School. Sumner moved to its current site on Cottage Avenue in 1908. By 1981 a Hall of Fame made its debut. Every day, Sumner students pass by the names on display in their hallways. Singers Ike and Tina Turner; Chuck Berry, Bobby McPherrin and Billy Davis, Jr. of The Fifth Dimension, Actor Robert Guillame, Comedian Dick Gregory and others. The school, named after the abolitionist Senator, Charles E. Sumner, was the only black public high school in St. Louis until 1927.