Bringing out their best: Kids with NYPD Giants program visit Camp Fiver

By Gabriele Hattermann

Camp activities included weaving lessons.

Photo courtesy of De'Andre Henderson
Thirty-nine NYPD Far Rockaway and Harlem Giants players between the ages of 9-14, along with eight NYPD officers, ended their summer break with a free sleepaway camp at Camp Fiver in Poolville, New York.

The Summer camp experience was a collaboration with the Fiver Children’s Foundation, a year-round youth development program with a 10-year history for young people ages 8-18 and funded with a grant through the Camp-School Partnership Demonstration Program in collaboration with the Association and the National Summer Learning Association. Additional financial support came from the NYPD and National Grid Foundations.

The retreat, held from Aug. 20 through Aug. 23, had been in the works for about a year and was the brainchild of NYPD Youth Coordination P.O. Pierre, who, along with his twin brother Jonathan, are alumni of Fiver’s 10-year program.
The camp is part of the Fiver Children’s Foundation and is named after one of Richard Adams’ “Watership Downs” characters, the small rabbit wanted to create a better future for his community.

With that goal in mind, retired Wall Street investment banker Tom Tucker founded the program in 1998 to create a positive and nurturing envi New York City kids from low-income families. What started as a summer camp evolved into a mentoring and counseling program, which accom ages 8 or 9 through high school graduation.

Jean-Pierre and his brother benefited greatly from the program, and Jean-Pierre wanted the kids he works with to have the same experience, oj to possibilities they didn’t think were possible.

“I saw the impact [Camp Fiver] had in my life,” Jean-Pierre said. “I went on a trip. The kids that I work with, they remind me of myself.”

Jean-Pierre got the ball rolling with the help of his brother, who works

For most kids, it was their first time at an overnight camp and away fro

Jean-Pierre said some parents would have never sent their kids to camp} memorable one for the youngsters.
“Since we deal with the kids on an everyday basis, they trusted us,” Jean-Pierre said.
The days were action-packed and introduced the players to activities that new memories by participating in activities like environmental education, kayaking, fishing, catching crawfish, swimming, hiking, bonfires, and...
"It really brought the best out of all the kids," Jean-Pierre said, pointing out that the kids most likely would have never tried weaving, creating scarves.

Far Rockaway player Reynold had never been to sleepaway camp before. He liked the environmental education program because he enjoyed being likely return to the camp.

"We got to go inside the creek, and we got to catch crawfish. It was fun," Reynold said.

12-year-old Cody Martinez from East Harlem had also never been to sleepaway before. He said he wasn't nervous before he left, but his mom was worried about what would likely return to the camp.

"My mom, she was like, it was like the first time that I'm actually gonna be away like very far away from her," Martinez said. "So she was like scared a little bit, but I was like, I-I was like, I'm ready to go."

Like most of the kids, he enjoyed playing Gaga Ball, a fast-paced sport played in an octagonal pit.

"That was a very interesting game," Martinez said. And while he already had a bond with his mates and cops, that bond had tightened.

"I trust them more," Martinez said.

13-year-old Leo Montgomery from Far Rockaway loved the lake and thought the whole experience was fun. He said his most rewarding experience at camp was catching a crawfish.

Harlem Giants player 13-year-old Russell Francis admitted that he was a little homesick but that his friends made the experience more fun. He said that camp would be boring or he had to do activities he didn't like.

"But honestly, it was fun," Francis declared, saying he would probably return next year.

The kids thought the cops did a great job as counselors, making the experience fun.

"They respected us. They always put us in place and always helped us when we needed it," Martinez said.
NYPD Lt. Lenora Moody started the Far Rockaway Giants Youth Mentoring Program (former Far Rockaway Colts) in 2018 as part of the “NeighCoordination School Initiative” (NCSI) in Far Rockaway, an NYPD mentorship program for at-risk youth in collaboration with the Department. The program aims to break the cycle of violence with tutoring, mentoring, and flag football training while improving the relationship between the community. In 2022, Moody brought the project, which has a high success rate, to Harlem.

Like P.O. Jean-Pierre, Lt. Moody believes in exposing the kids to more opportunities. Moody explained team building was a critical aspect of the project, which brings players from Harlem and Rockaway to get to know each other better.

“A lot of time, violence indicators are people going from one jurisdiction to another, or one community to another, and that’s how some violence happens,” Moody said.

Moody explained that from a police perspective, territorial behavior can drive violence among young people.

“But now you have people that are growing up in Harlem that say, ‘I know people in Far Rockaway, they are good people. I know somebody in Far Rockaway is saying, ‘I know people in Harlem. They are good people, they are my team,’” Moody said. “Because we fall under one banner.”

Moody expressed her gratitude to P.O. Jean-Pierre and his brother and praised the Camp Fiver staff for their commitment to the kids even though the camp season was over.

Lt. Moody said that some of the kids had been apprehensive about going.

“Once they were free to be themselves, that was it,” Moody said. “It’s scary for kids even though they want their kids to be a part of it.”

Some parents even asked Moody how to sign their kids up for the Fiver.

“If it’s something that’s for free for city kids, they want their kids to be a part of it,” Moody said. “That’s how much they loved Camp Fiver.”
“We have a lot of admiration for the efforts that Lt. Moody and the officers are making to build a stronger relationship between the community Ko said. “We're happy to be a part of it.”