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**ATHLETIC HAVEN RECIPIENT OF 2018 STEWARTS SHOPS HOLIDAY MATCH**

ALBANY, NY (May 7, 2018) – With support from the Stewarts Shops’ 2017 Holiday Match, [Athletic Haven,](http://www.athletichaven.org/) a Capital District non-profit organization, has launched a second AAU boys basketball team and is formulating plans for its first softball team.

Founded by area coach Scott McIntyre in 2016, Athletic Haven provides free sports travel teams and low-cost training opportunities for youth who may otherwise have given up on sports due to performance, financial or access issues. It was launched in October 2016 in memory of McIntyre’s 6-year old son Tyler, who passed away in 2012.

With support from Stewarts Shops and community organizations, Athletic Haven created the AH All-Stars, a 12U AAU boys basketball team in March 2017. It was the first travel team formed under Athletic Haven’s Awareness Athletics, a program designed to develop athletic opportunities for youth in exchange for them paying-it-forward to the community.

“We are so grateful for the funding received from the Stewarts Shops Holiday Match Program,” said McIntyre. “As an entirely volunteer-based organization, this support provides a lifeline for our continued efforts. With continued support, we can expand our offerings and reach more youth throughout our region.”

**Paying-It-Forward**

The match funds also underscore Athletic Haven’s message to the youth it serves. A key element of Athletic Haven’s Athletic Awareness Program is the Pay-It-Forward aspect. Each teams’ player is responsible for acquiring a sponsor for their season.  This sponsor will support that player, donating based on their performance and on qualities such as sportsmanship, teamwork, etc. At the end of the season, the player will donate those funds to a local charity.

The charity chosen by this year’s 12U basketball team is Maddie’s Mark based in Guilderland, New York. Maddie’s Mark Foundation was established in early 2012 to honor Madeline Musto, a 5 year old girl who suffered from an inoperable brain stem tumor (DIPG). The foundation's mission is to spread Madeline's spirit by providing opportunities, creating environments, and enabling children and families live a life of 'best days ever.'

“This aspect teaches our youth that if you’re receiving something for free, pay it forward, and give to the next person. Hopefully they will take that lesson with them. These things are bigger than sports. These are all things they can take with them for the rest of their lives,” said McIntyre.

The Stewarts Shops Holiday Match was started 30 years ago to benefit organizations/programs for kids under the age of 18 in the areas of social services, health, education, recreations, and the arts. Donations are collected in Stewarts Shops throughout the region from Thanksgiving Day through Christmas Day. Stewarts Shops match customers’ donations dollar for dollar, with no administrative fees.

According to the organization, the 2017 Holiday Match program set another record, raising $1.89 million for local children’s organizations donating $945,000 to the program, which is approximately $19,000 more than the 2016 season.

For more information, visit [www.athletichaven.org](http://www.athletichaven.org/).

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