



MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

NEW TENNIS PROGRAM HITS CENTER COURT

Florence Tennis Association Unveils Ron James Youth Tennis Program

The Ron James Youth Tennis Program held its first on-court clinics for area children this morning at the Dr. Eddie Floyd Florence Tennis Center. Certified tennis instructors led the children through an hour-long regimen of warm-up drills, coordination exercises, and practice on forehands and backhands. The small group clinics moved quickly and everyone had a great time.

The Program's first six-week session, which includes Tuesday and Thursday clinics through the end of July, will cover the basics of tennis strokes, singles play, and the rules and etiquette of the game. Thirty-nine students from Girls University and 19 from the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Pee Dee, all of them newcomers to the sport of tennis, are enrolled in this first session, and organizers hope that most of them will continue after the school year begins and the programs shifts to after-school clinics. They will be joined by youngsters from the City of Florence After-School Centers as soon as the City lifts Covid restrictions on the use of buses.

The Ron James Program, a member of the United States Tennis Association National Junior Tennis and Learning (NJTL) network, is designed to bring the health, fitness, and sportsmanship benefits of tennis into the lives of children who would not normally have access to the sport. It works closely with its partner organizations, the City Athletics and Sports Tourism Department, the Boys and Girls Clubs, Girls University, the City After-School Program, and the Florence Tennis Center to integrate on-court activities and learning opportunities—with the goal of helping young people reach their personal objectives and live more rewarding lives.

Funded by generous local donors and by grants from the South Carolina Tennis Patrons Foundation, the USTA Foundation, the USTA Southern Section, and the Florence Tennis Association (FTA), the program currently is currently managed by the FTA Board, which assures its sustainability and enables it to solicit donations as a non-profit organization. However, plans call for making the program a separate non-profit with its own community-based Board of Directors within two years. Former FTA President Paul Pittman said, "Our long-term strategy is simple: we intend to make this a self-supporting entity and a permanent part of the area tennis community. All of us in the FTA love the sport of tennis and we want to make it available to others who will enjoy it as much as we do." Ernie James, another Former FTA President, added "We believe that bringing tennis into the lives of children without charge and with fun and teamwork included is one of the best things we can do for our community and for its future."

The program is named in honor of educator, coach, and tennis professional Ronald Avan James, who died unexpectedly in 2019.

The FTA is an award-winning all-volunteer non-profit organization that works to grow the game of tennis in the greater Florence area by conducting leagues, clinics, tournaments, and other activities and working with area governments and businesses to make certain that first-rate tennis facilities are available to the public.

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