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COMMUNITY
MINISTRIES**

At the Heart of Community

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CIVIL RIGHTS ICON CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS HONORS UCM CREEKSIDE VILLAGE COMMUNITY CENTER STUDENT FOR ESSAY



PHOTO 1:
12-04-15_UCM_Creekside_photo1.jpg



PHOTO 2: 12-04-15_UCM_Creekside_photo2.jpg

Photos attached as 300+ dpi with email distributed to media.

PHOTO 1 CAPTION: Pictured at Fort Hunt Elementary School are (from left): UCM Executive Director Nichelle Mitchem, fourth grader Rejean Trimmer, Civil Rights leader Congressman John Lewis, and UCM Creekside Village Community Center (CVCC) Supervisor Deborah Finley.

PHOTO 2 CAPTION:

Civil Rights icon Congressman John Lewis autographs fourth grader Rejean Trimmer's essay about Rosa Parks, with Fort Hunt Elementary School Principal Thomas Fitzpatrick and School Instructional Aide and CVCC volunteer Kathy Lehner.

FULL TEXT:

On Nov. 16, fourth grader Rejean Trimmer – who attends the after-school program at UCM's Creekside Village Community Center (CVCC) – was celebrated at a visit to her Fort Hunt Elementary School by Civil Rights icon U.S. Rep. John Lewis, D-Georgia, civil rights icon. She was recognized for the essay she wrote last sprint about Rosa Parks, African-American Civil Rights activist.

Creekside Village Community Center and programs are operated at the apartment complex by United Community Ministries (UCM). The Community Center is a collaborative effort with UCM, Fairfax County's Department of Community and Neighborhood Services, Mount Vernon Police Department, Mount Vernon Fire and Rescue, local schools, businesses, area faith communities, and the apartments residents. Property owner JLV Partners LLP is a central partner, providing the space and related services at the apartment community.

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Community Center longtime volunteer mentor Kathy Lehner, who works as an instructional aide at the school, heard about Rejean's essay. Lehner was so inspired by the then-third grader's academic progress that she sent it to Congressman Lewis, often called "one of the most courageous persons the Civil Rights Movement ever produced."

With the fourth graders, the Congressman took questions and spoke about his life – including his roots in Alabama and his role in the struggle to end legalized racial discrimination and segregation – and autographed Rejean's essay. His advice to the students included: "Be kind. Never hate or become bitter. The way of peace is better. Never give up." He said education is the key to any success and credited his teachers with his own.

"Rejean is truly an example of a resilient child," says Deborah Finely, CVCC supervisor. She manages UCM's after-school programs as part of a spectrum of activities designed to foster community spirit and to strengthen the academics and leadership skills of community youth, as well as their parents. "In spite of Rejean's academic struggles and environmental influences, she has persevered and accepted support to improve her reading and writing skills. We are all so proud of her. I am especially grateful for our Center's many teen and adult volunteers who share their time and attention to tutor and mentor our children. Rejean is just one example of the difference that caring adults can make in a young person's life."

"Rejean is one of many young people in our community who face an opportunity gap," adds Nichelle Mitchem, UCM Executive Director. "Two of the older girls at the Creekside Center became mentors to her, in addition to the caring adults like Deborah and volunteer Kathy. The changes they helped create for Rejean were immediate, notably in her behavior and the dramatic improvement in her reading skills and her grades. These changes have a long-term ripple effect that will extend far beyond today to her ongoing self-confidence and future academic success."

UCM's children's programs, like the after-school program at Creekside Village, afford students with the opportunity to be connected to caring, positive adults who mentor them to ensure their personal, academic, and ultimately career success. Thanks to generous community support, children and families have a fighting chance at creating a better life for themselves."

"That is how we can truly effect community change: by ensuring a better future for the next generation," continues Mitchem. "UCM is committed to building a safe, nurturing community for our children. We, as a society, can either invest early to close disparities, prevent achievement gaps, and create opportunities for success – or we can pay later to remediate disparities, when they are harder and more costly to close."

United Community Ministries (UCM) mobilizes the power of community to equip, educate, and empower people to measurably improve their lives. For more than 46 years, UCM has provided a vital connection between people in need and the people committed to helping them thrive. Services include:

- **Immediate Help.** For families and individuals in crisis, UCM provides food, financial aid, counseling, and referrals to other resources.
- **Education and Employment.** Services such as job training and coaching, full-day early care and learning, ESL and citizenship classes, and parental education help people achieve stability and self-reliance.
- **Community Engagement.** UCM's neighborhood centers, with after-school programs and leadership training, engage youth and families in skill-building and broader social networks for success.

In Fiscal Year 2015, thanks to generous community support, UCM provided life-changing assistance to 10,200 individuals in 4,000 families in the Alexandria portion of Fairfax County. This included 5,000 children – more than any other agency in the Huntington-Mount Vernon area.

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