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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

First Tee of West Michigan Expanding to Kalamazoo County

KALAMAZOO, Mich. – February 10, 2019 – First Tee of West Michigan, in partnership with the Kalamazoo Junior Golf Association and the City of Kalamazoo, is planning to expand its programs to Kalamazoo County starting in spring 2021.

First Tee is an international non-profit youth development program that teaches life skills, values, and healthy habits through the game of golf. The curriculum serves youth ages 7 to 17. There are seven chapters in Michigan, more than 150 chapters around the country and 10 chapters internationally.

First Tee of West Michigan, established in 2011 in Grand Rapids, currently impacts young people in Kent, Ottawa and Muskegon counties. First Tee started with 73 students in 2011 and now works with more than 1,200 youth at 15 area golf courses. The organization believes it can impact more than 500 young people in Kalamazoo annually by 2023.

“Kalamazoo is the one of the largest population centers in the state without a First Tee chapter presence,” said Executive Director of First Tee of West Michigan Tyler Smies. “We are incredibly fortunate to partner with the Kalamazoo Junior Golf Association and the City of Kalamazoo, who have strong and sustainable junior golf programs. We can’t wait to provide First Tee curriculum to more young people in Kalamazoo who may not otherwise have the opportunity to learn through golf because of transportation or economic barriers.”

PGA Professional Dean Marks, who operates the City of Kalamazoo’s three courses, and is also president of the Kalamazoo Junior Golf Association, is also excited. “The KJGA has provided affordable golf opportunities to 400+ youth annually for over 30 years. The opportunity to partner with First Tee and their life skills and values curriculum will increase our outreach to area youth. That is a win for the community, a win for the youth, and a win for golf and the future of Kalamazoo. We are excited to expand the use of Red Arrow Golf Course to ensure that any family who wants their kids to learn important life skills through the game of golf will be able to do so regardless of their ability to pay.”

Youth golf tournaments and clinics run by the KJGA will continue to operate in 2020, while First Tee develops relationships in Kalamazoo, recruits mentors and fundraises. First Tee’s programs are planned for all three of Kalamazoo’s municipal golf courses in 2021 - Red Arrow, Eastern Hills, and Milham Park. Smies says partnering with local school districts and youth-serving



organizations is also critical to First Tee's ability to impact students who otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity to learn through golf. First Tee hopes to begin outreach with area schools and organizations in the upcoming year in preparation for the 2021 program launch.

First Tee relies heavily on volunteers and donors from communities in order to provide discounted programs to youth. Interested golfers, parents, volunteers, and donors can learn more about the organization and expansion plans at the West Michigan Golf Show, February 14-16 at DeVos Place in Grand Rapids, Mich. In addition, First Tee is hosting a Meet & Greet event for all Kalamazoo County residents on March 11, 2020 from 5 p.m. - 7 p.m. at the Kalamazoo Parks & Recreation Building at Homer Stryker Field, 251 Mills Ave. Interested individuals are encouraged to RSVP.

For more information on First Tee of West Michigan or to RSVP for the March 11 event, contact 616-208-1177 or visit firstteewestmichigan.org.

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