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CITY OF LOS ANGELES AGENCIES TEAM UP ON PILOT PROGRAM CERTIFYING WOMEN TO WORK AS BASKETBALL REFEREES AND SCOREKEEPERS AT OVER 180 CITY RECREATION CENTERS

Staff at the Los Angeles Economic and Workforce Department and Recreation and Parks collaborate on six-week trainings; goal is to create jobs and increase opportunities for women to become sporting officials

LOS ANGELES--An innovative program training young women to work as basketball referees and scorekeepers at any of the city's 180 Recreation Centers concluded recently with 15 women picking up completion certificates. Plans are under way to recruit another class and expand the program.

Jan Perry, General Manager of the Economic and Workforce Development Department, said the pilot shows that L.A. city agencies working together can be innovative and provide sorely-needed services. It also demonstrates City of L.A.'s commitment to improving gender equity across the workforce, she said.

Mayor Eric Garcetti in August 2015 signed an executive order directing all city departments to evaluate city services to increase gender parity and to promote equal opportunities for the advancement of women and girls.

"It's great to see the enthusiasm that these young women have in claiming a new role in sports," said Perry, who handed out certificates at a April 28 "graduation" in Boyle Heights. "It's a slam dunk for gender equity."

Michael Shull, General Manager of Recreation and Parks, said his department fully supports the workshops.

"This pilot program in partnership with the Economic and Workforce Development Department is an excellent example of the actions we are taking to increase girl's participation in our sports program citywide and to create more opportunities for women to work as sports officials in a male-dominated field", Shull said.

The women underwent six weeks of training, working from a curriculum developed by Sampson Brue, Regional Scout for the National Basketball Association's Referee Operations. The pilot program was conceived by staff in both agencies to increase the ranks of women refs in sporting events.

Citywide about 2% of referees are female, said Rob DeHart, a supervisor in Recreation and Parks' Municipal Sports Section. The numbers are just as sparse at the national level, where two women currently work as officials in the NBA, Brue said. "There is a severe shortage of women refs nationwide. What better way to turn that around than at the grass roots?"

Janelva Williams was among 15 who proudly accepted a WORC (Women Officials Recruitment and Certification) certificate that will allow her to work as an independent contractor. She's already called games at Palisades Recreation Center and is looking forward to more. Her daughter, Ja Narie Rhambo, also completed certification.

DeHart said Recreation and Parks will continue the pilot program and is in the process of recruiting the next round of women. Ultimately, he said, Recreation and Parks will be looking for additional funding to make the program permanent. "We've shown that it works," he said.

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