

# Mulligans and more

## Mentor program a hole in one for kids

By Joe Ax  
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EAST HARTFORD — Kareem Trice, 14, paused over the ball, putter gripped in both hands, and studied the path the white sphere would take along the green's surface on its way to the hole some 15 feet away.

He pulled the club head back slightly, then stroked the ball toward the hole, leaving it less than 2 feet away.

"That's a nice shot," said John Rossi, who spent the summer as Kareem's mentor as part of the Mulligans mentoring program, operated by the Community Renewal Team, a nonprofit group that provides anti-poverty services to people in 59 municipalities in central Connecticut.

The two were playing one of their final rounds of golf during CRT's annual golf tournament fund-raiser on Tuesday. Hours later, Kareem would learn that the putter he held, along with the set of golf clubs he had used for weeks, were his to keep, a reward for "excelling in all areas of the program," according to CRT's Christopher McCluskey, who helped to start Mulligans this year.

Most of the children, who ranged in age from 13 to 17, were culled from CRT's juvenile justice programs, says McCluskey, the assistant director of CRT's criminal justice



East Hartford Middle School student Kareem Trice, 14, hits a chip shot as his mentor, John Rossi, left, and another teen, 16-year-old Christopher Olsen, await their turns. The trio were playing golf as part of Mulligans, a mentoring program for at-risk inner-city youth run by the Community Renewal Team.

CRT

department.

"We focused on at-risk inner city youth," he says.

McCluskey did not focus on golf as a conduit for the mentoring program at first, as he searched for an activity that would provide some common ground between mentors and children that were often of different ages, ethnic backgrounds, and economic class.

"A lot of mentoring programs aren't successful because adults and kids that age don't have a lot in common. They don't share interests in music, or television, or movies, or clothing, or anything," he says.

But golf has become much more popular among inner-city youth, a direct result of the immense success of phenom Tiger Woods, McCluskey says. The United States Golf Association agreed to donate more than \$7,000 for the program, which served 24

teens, including nine girls and 16 boys, all from East Hartford and Hartford.

Kareem admits he used to "get into trouble" in school, but that has changed since he began playing golf with Rossi.

"I haven't been in trouble once since I started," he says proudly.

As part of the program, the children received 90 minutes of golf instruction every Friday from pro Jim Goshdigin, the director of the Nike Golf Learning Center at Goodwin Park in Hartford. They would then get together with their mentors once a week to play a round of golf.

The children also took a 10-week "life skills" program, which encouraged them to undertake projects. The successful completion of the projects made the children eligible for scholarships ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000.

Kareem, whose goal is to become a movie director, is working on a film about living in East Hartford — the aspects he likes and does not like.

When asked what he doesn't like, he responds, "Gangs. People driving too fast." He says he enjoys after-school programs and playing sports.

Kareem, who lives with his aunt in town and attends East Hartford Middle School, says he doesn't know his father.

"He's a real quiet kid, shy," Rossi says. "But he's very mature for his age. He's composed. He's had a lot of unfortunate things happen to him. I grew up without a father. That's part of the reason I'm doing this."

Rossi says he and Kareem will continue to spend time together even after the weather becomes too cold for golf.