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Sen. Gregg Lauds Dover Police, DHA For Joint Effort; Paves Way For Grants

by Michael Gillis

Dover -- U.S. Republican Sen. Judd Gregg paid a visit last week to the Dover Housing Authority to laud the combined efforts of public housing officials and Dover Police.

But the two local agencies are receiving more than kudos; they are in line for more than \$100,000 of federal grant money over the next 18 months, seed money that kicked off the Dover Youth Safe Haven, an umbrella of community-based after school programs and police ministrations.

Dover is one of only four communities in the country to receive the funding. Gregg helped secure \$1.25 million for the Eisenhower Foundation through his role as chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, State, and the Judiciary.

At last week's ceremony inside the Seymour Osman Community Center, Eisenhower Foundation President Dr. Lynn Curtis presented a check to PlusTime NH CEO Cynthia Billings, who will work with the Dover Housing Authority and Dover Police Department to help administer the collaborative program.

The after school programs are aimed at helping students in public housing maintain school grades, learn responsibility, and shepherd them from crime by improving quality of life. The Dover Youth Safe Haven and police mini-station is designed to promote positive police involvement among youth.

"While major crimes have decreased across the country, juvenile crime has increased," said DHA Executive Director Jack Buckley, citing a lack of education and funding for programs as culprits.

DHA has been at the forefront of after school programs for years, offering a variety of home-work, career, activity, and health programs for students during the critical hours between 3 and 6 p.m. "Dover is to be commended for addressing what happens to kids from 3 to 6 p.m.," Billings said.

Jacob Murray, a 13-year old resident of DHA for two years, agreed. "This is a great place to come if you're bored," he said. Other young students offered similar praise for DHA's programs. Dover Youth Safe Haven will bridge those programs with police, who are already active at DHA with two community policing officers. "Dover has been very fortunate to have the complete support of the Dover Police Department," Buckley said.

Curtis explained that his foundation's study of Japan highlighted the significance of police spread throughout the community in ministations, a concept that was the genesis of the program. Curtis added that it makes sense to marry community policing with strong after school programs, something Dover Police chief William Fenniman agreed with.

"We do pride ourselves on proactive, community-based programs," Fenniman said. Fenniman went on to say that Dover was chosen for the Youth Safe Haven grant not because the city is in trouble.

"The city of Dover was not picked because we have a problem," he said. "[We were] picked because we're known to make a commitment." Sen. Gregg agreed, saying that Dover has proved itself time and again. "Dover has once again led the way," Gregg said.

Gregg complimented Dover on the success of its programs, and applauded Fenniman for participating, despite the extra work involved. "Chief, I congratulate you and your department for being willing to do this," he said. Later, Gregg said that Dover Youth Safe haven should serve to inspire others.

"I am impressed to see the funding I provoked for this program put into use in a New Hampshire community," he said. "This is an important alliance that I think will serve as an example to the rest of the country. Not only does it show that the police can be a great resource for the community, but it reinforces the important concept that when community organizations work together, they can accomplish more than what they could possibly do separately,"

Dover Youth Safe Haven will serve 100 kids involved in DHA's after school programs.

Executive Councilor Ruth Griffin acknowledged that the Dover Housing Authority is aggressive about augmenting its programs.

"DHA keeps me on my toes," she said. "It's quite competitive."