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February 17th, 2014

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RIVER OF REFUGE PARTNERS WITH KANSAS CITY BLUES RUGBY FOR FUNDRAISER

Rugby team will camp out on the roof of the soon-to-open River of Refuge transitional living center (formerly Park Lane Hospital) until they raise \$25,000 for the local non-profit

KANSAS CITY, Mo. - River of Refuge, a local nonprofit aiding homeless families finding temporary shelter in motels, has partnered with the Kansas City Blues Rugby Club for an extreme fundraising stunt this spring. The KC Blues Rugby players will camp out in tents (rain, snow or shine) on the roof of the River of Refuge transitional living center until they are able to raise \$25,000 to help open the city's first-of-its-kind comprehensive transitional housing dedicated solely to homeless working families living in motels.

With a 15-man roster on a rugby team, there will be 15 teammates who go up on the roof of the three-story building on the afternoon of Thursday, March 6 living in tents under the watchful eye of a web camera with a goal to raise \$25,000 in only a few days. As one of the top rugby clubs in the country (playing in Division 1 and qualifying for the National Championship in 2010), the Kansas City Blues have made it a priority to get more involved in its local community through nonprofit work and fundraising.

"We created a strong relationship with River of Refuge during our off-season this year and we're so excited to be working with an organization that is doing such good work," said Kansas City Blues Rugby Club President, Derek Mannell. "It's rewarding to be a part of something for which we can truly see lives being changed and an organization able to build something like these new apartments for local homeless families."

The Kansas City Blues has scheduled a practice training session on the grounds of the River of Refuge prior to "taking their position" on the roof on March 6. Rugby team members and former team members will approach friends, family, business associates and the general public to raise funds through the website www.rooftopblues.com where there is an easy-to-use, safe online donation process. The web camera will broadcast live the activities of the Blues teammates as they camp out on the roof and use social media to spread the awareness of their fundraising stunt.

This inaugural Rooftop Blues event will aid River of Refuge to open its first 11 apartments which will offer free temporary refuge for working parents and their children in one single location. The former Park Lane Hospital sat vacant for more than a decade before River of Refuge purchased it and began rehabbing the building.

"This is a pivotal time for homelessness in Kansas City," said John Wiley, founder and president of River of Refuge. "We've been in the strategic planning stages at River of Refuge for the past couple of years all the while helping homeless working families living in motels find permanent homes one at a time.

"But now we're ready to take our fundraising to the next level so we can help multiple families all at one time! This partnership - as crazy and fun as it is - is exactly the kind of thing we enjoy being a part of. It helps us raise the much needed funds we need to open our doors to aid families and it helps us build awareness for this tremendous problem."

Through its data and research, River of Refuge estimates that as many as 300 to 400 working families are living in motels with their children throughout Greater Kansas City on any given night. It is a specific mission of River of Refuge to help working families get out of motels, teach them to live independently (operating on a budget they already earn at their jobs) and find permanent homes they can afford.

“Because there has been tremendous growth in family homelessness in the past several years due to the economic recession, there just simply aren’t enough beds available at family homeless shelters to serve the number of local families looking for shelter,” Wiley said. “We hope that when we open River of Refuge with the community’s help, we can help reduce the burden on the area’s family homeless shelters, which we know are already at capacity.”

River of Refuge intends to open a transitional family housing facility in the former Park Lane Hospital in Kansas City, Mo., to serve as a regional lodging complex for families. When it opens at 5155 Raytown Rd., the complex will provide a direct alternative to pay-by-the-week motels as well as offer a complete program for transition to self sufficiency including financial counseling and access to significant community resources needed to be successful in finding permanent housing. Until the first apartments are complete, the organization continues to place one family at a time through donations, referrals and volunteers.

About the Kansas City Blues

Originally established in 1966, the Kansas City Blues Rugby Club is nearing 50 years of success both regionally and nationally. The Blues pride themselves on winning with homegrown talent which translates to a strong commitment to its community. Through Heartland Youth Rugby, high school programs: Jr. Blues, St. Thomas Aquinas, Blue Valley, Olathe, St. James, along with other philanthropic endeavors, the Blues are giving back to KC. For more information, please visit www.kcblues.org.

About River of Refuge

Wiley founded River of Refuge in 2009 after he witnessed a group of children loading a school bus from the parking lot of an old, run-down motel near his home in Raytown, Mo. River of Refuge was created to specifically address thousands of working families who have become trapped in pay-by-the-week motels throughout Greater Kansas City and into the suburbs. For more information, please visit www.riverofrefuge.com.