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### **Student Athletes Step up to the Plate for Local Nonprofit**

*Partnership fosters a sense of volunteerism among today's 'Net Generation'*

Increasingly high schools and universities are challenged to incorporate community service into their curriculum to fuel a sense of volunteerism among today's millennials – creating programs that are meaningful, challenging and fun for students that are often called the *Net Generation*. A volunteer program that has proven very popular among Grand Canyon University (GCU) students is its partnership with the Arizona Recreation Center for the Handicapped (ARCH), an alliance which supports personal and professional growth of GCU students, while promoting the independence and self-esteem of handicapped individuals.

“Our partnership with GCU helps us achieve our goal of developing physical and emotional well-being, self-expression and creative and independent thinking in humans with disabilities,” said Kip Murray, executive director of ARCH, an organization offering handicapped individuals the opportunity to obtain higher levels of function, pride, dignity and self-esteem through physical fitness.

Twice a week, student athletes from GCU volunteer at ARCH – about two miles from campus – offering assistance in therapy, weight training and other physical activities. Their work is part of the Center's STEPS to Health and Wellness program, which promotes healthy eating, physical fitness, healthy choices, and preventive screenings. Many of the athletes involved in the program will likely pursue degrees in healthcare or education – two areas in which are in critical need of compassionate professionals, and in which GCU has a strong focus.

Recently, GCU hosted its second annual “STEP up to the Plate” softball game, pitting “handicapped” GCU baseball players against ARCH program participants in a demonstration of true sportsmanship and team spirit. The 20 players from GCU competed with various self-imposed handicaps: legs tied together, blind folds, using a wheelchair, and one arm tethered in an effort to “level the playing field” with their physically challenged opponents.

“This is a win-win for everyone – the participants at ARCH receive specialized training in fitness and sports, and our students gain a better understanding of the disabled population and the importance of living in an inclusive community,” said Mack Sloan,

Physical Education Instructor at GCU and the person responsible for the University's involvement at ARCH. Sloan noted that many of the students have formed friendships with the ARCH participants.

Founded in 1975, ARCH is the only facility of its kind in the state, and only one of three organizations in the entire nation that offer a full range of indoor and outdoor programs for developmentally, physically and emotionally disabled children, teens and adults. The Center serves approximately 3500 participants annually.

“Our philosophy at ARCH is to effectively respond to the important needs of humans,” said Murray. “Recognizing members of the handicapped community as whole human beings with the same needs, desires and fears as everyone else is our true mission, and it means a great deal to the Center and our members that GCU athletes recognize our mission and are willing to help us achieve our goal.”

“It's an incredibly rewarding experience for our athletes,” said Sloan. “They return to campus with feeling of pride and accomplishment, along with an understanding of the challenges faced by those with a range of disabilities. Our hope is that we grow these students into caring and concerned professionals, living and working in our community.”

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