

Hope Is Powerful Medicine: Serving Front Range Families A Dose Of The Raptors

by John Arthur

Writer for and on behalf of the City of Glendale

Glendale's *Infinity Park* has a long history of community involvement, with a particular focus on local youth and families. On Saturday, May 13, the *Raptors* continued that tradition, beginning a new relationship with one of the most exciting and important non-profits in the country: *HopeKids*. Creating a powerful, unique community for families with a child suffering a life-threatening illness, the Colorado chapter of *HopeKids* facilitates ongoing events and activities for residents of the Front Range and beyond. On May 13, many participating families got their first taste of rugby, as the *Glendale's Elite Men's* and *Women's Division One* teams hosted a pair of back-to-back, friendly matches. *Infinity Park* and the *Raptors* welcomed *HopeKids* families by donating tickets for the game.

HopeKids is a national non-profit, founded in Arizona in 2001, with chapters across the country. Joining Arizona, Kansas City, Minnesota, and North Texas, the Colorado chapter was founded just over a year ago. Executive Director Howie Hutchinson explains that one of the most important aspects of *HopeKids* is that the program serves the entire family — parents and siblings alongside the sick child — by creating an ongoing calendar of events in which families can participate. By working with local communities, *HopeKids* Colorado is averaging 15 events per month, but as Hutchinson explains, there's much more to the program than just activities: "That's just the surface level. Sure the events are fun and exciting, but the real impact happens when all these families come together. They understand what others are going

through and they form a kind of support community." As both a community meeting place and a hub for Colorado entertainment, *Infinity Park* presents a perfect venue for the organization, and joins a long list of Colorado businesses working with *HopeKids* to improve the lives of participants.

Collectively, the five *HopeKids* chapters serve more than 3,500 families, approximately 275 of which belong to the Colorado chapter Hutchinson oversees. Continued growth is expected, however, and the Colorado program receives between 20 and 30 new applicants every month. Funding for *HopeKids* comes from the community; from individuals and companies, but often through donations in-kind — tickets donated for a sports event or theater space for a film screening, for instance. These donations allow *HopeKids* to do a lot with a little. Using minimal resources to maximize opportunities for families is an important aspect of the work done by the organization nationally. Hutchinson and his colleague, Program Director Lisa Sweeney, represent the entire staff of *HopeKids* Colorado. In spite of the small staff, *HopeKids* works to ensure that all of its events are easily accessible to the families it services, both in terms of cost and planning. Hutchinson, who has worked for non-profits for a decade, says that the organization wants every event to be free for participating families, supplementing donations with fundraising when necessary.

Infinity Park's commitment to its fans and to the community shined through, with the facility donating tickets for all *HopeKids* attendees. For most, the weekend games were their first exposure to rugby, and though they had not seen the sport before,



Glendale Raptors love interacting and sharing the love of sport with kids after every match as showcased by Scrumhalf Mose Timoteo. Photo by Seth McConnell

when asked the youngsters said they were excited after hearing promotions on the radio and seeing them on social media. The men's elite team delivered on the promise of excitement, routing the visiting *NorCal Pelicans* 88-5. Some of the young *HopeKids* participants expressed concern at the absence of helmets and pads, but were reassured that serious injuries are rare. Asked about their impressions of the game, these fans-in-the-making made it clear that even without a precise grasp of the sport's rules or strategy, the pure athleticism of the Rap-

tor players was impressive.

Community commitment is a cornerstone of Glendale's *Infinity Park*, and of the *Raptors*. In partnering with organizations like *HopeKids*, the facility and teams are able to demonstrate that commitment, while working to help enrich the lives of families struggling to face the challenges of life-threatening illnesses. Like players on the pitch, these families embody rugby's tough, resilient ethos — the smiles at this game show that hope is, indeed, powerful medicine.

Eleven Weeks Of Classes Begin At MACC On June 5

For 11 weeks beginning June 5, the *Mizel Arts & Culture Center (MACC)* will be conducting classes under the supervision of professional theatrical and visual artists who are also experienced educators. There are a wide variety of classes to choose from for grades pre-K through 12th. Classes are at the Center, 350 S. Dahlia St., or at the nearby *Graland Country Day School*, 55 Clermont St. *The Art Academy* classes include everything from drawing, painting, pottery and bronze casting to other art forms such as cartooning, fused glass, and digital media (photography and filmmaking). Information: 303-316-6360.



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