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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 9, 2015

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MAYOR EMANUEL ANNOUNCES COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, VIOLENCE PREVENTION PILOT PROGRAM IN LA VILLITA PARK

Effort Will Saturate Park with Additional Programming for Residents on Weekend Nights

Mayor Rahm Emanuel today announced a new pilot program in Little Villages' La Villita Park to increase positive community engagement and prevent violence. The pilot program brings together the Mayor's Office, the Chicago Park District, the Chicago Police Department and community leaders in Little Village to offer an unprecedented level of partnership and programming, developed based on feedback from residents, to boost usage of safe spaces for families to gather and play. The pilot launches today, with the start of a new adult softball league in La Villita Park.

"La Villita has already become a vibrant green space for Little Village and through this innovative partnership and programming, we are ensuring that it provides a safe space for our youth and families to enjoy their community," said Mayor Rahm Emanuel. "From community policing to programming in our parks, we will continue using proven strategies to make our communities safer while also drawing on ideas like this one to ensure youth have safe activities when they need them the most."

Under the pilot, the Park District is saturating La Villita with programming on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights all summer long – hosting Night Out in the Park events every weekend. In addition to the new adult softball leagues, La Villita Park will feature targeted programming for community residents of all ages, including frequent movies in the parks, soccer leagues, late night basketball, arts programming including mural projects and organized skateboard programming. Little Village community members will be prioritized in Park District program registration and park fees will be waived for community meetings held by the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO) and the Park Advisory Council.

The city is also partnering with the local park advisory council, LVEJO, Beyond the Ball, La Villita Church, YMCA, Urban Life Skills, Little Village Chamber of Commerce, Little Village Boys and Girls Club, Enlace, Madiero Middle School, Tepochcalli School, the Chicago Park District and the Chicago Public Schools. with the Little Village Chamber of Commerce to bring food vendors to the park.

Additionally, police will prioritize foot and bike patrols over police cars in the park, and will host know your rights trainings for area youth.

The pilot program stems from a December 2014 report issued by the Mayor's Commission for a Safer Chicago – a group of over 130 community and faith leaders, City staff, academic partners, practitioners, parents, and youth, which in December 2014 released a strategic report containing recommendations for addressing and preventing violence in Chicago.

The Commission's report included strategies and recommendations related to park and other public spaces, with a goal of ensuring that all youth and families in all neighborhoods have access to safe spaces to gather, play, and participate in appealing activities in their community. The La Villita Park plan incorporates several of these recommendations, including:

- Create a process for ongoing community input into evolving program needs and interests for park, library, and school spaces
- Engage community volunteers to mentor, coach, and provide positive activities in neighborhoods that experience violence
- Promote a system that matches facilities that have available space with organizations that need space for their programs

"We are excited to be celebrating the full opening of La Villita Park. This is a great example of what partnership between the community and the City can accomplish," said Robert Castaneda, a member of the Mayor's Commission, La Villita PAC President and Executive Director of Beyond the Ball. "Today, we aren't just recognizing the completion of the park but we are also committing to the collaboration that needs to persist in order to assure that this vital community play space continues to be a place of positive activity and safety in our neighborhood."

"La Villita Park is an extraordinary example of community-led revitalization," said Antonio R. Lopez, Executive Director of LVEJO. "We are now committed to this community partnership with the city to ensure that the new park is a safe environment for all community members to enjoy."

The 22-acre La Villita Park, which officially opened in December 2014, has just completed and opened the baseball diamonds. It is the former home of Celotex and is the largest USEPA superfund to park conversion in a major American city. The park was developed with input gathered at more than a dozen stakeholder and public meetings. Park features include artificial turf soccer fields with sports lighting; two basketball courts; a skate park; a large playground with rubber safety surfacing and water spray feature; promenade through the park; a multi-use trail; and landscape elements throughout the park. All areas of the park are now open, with the exception of a natural grass baseball and softball field and comfort station with concession and restrooms.

Before the opening of La Villita, the South Lawndale community ranked the number two out of 77 community areas most in need of open space, as it had an open space deficit of 78.09 acres. La Villita reduces the open space deficit to 56.67 acres, and South Lawndale now ranks number seven out of 77 with respect to open space need. With the opening of La Villita, the 5,800 families in South Lawndale with a child under the age of six years old will now live within walking distance to this park. Children and families in Brighton Park, which is the community ranked number one out of 77 areas most in need of open space, will also benefit from this nearby park development.

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