



## BURKE, WARREN HELPS NORTHSIDE INSTITUTION HIGH RIDGE CHARGERS CONTINUE ITS LIFE-CHANGING WORK WITH AREA YOUTH

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Football, cheerleading, and an army of committed and selfless volunteers have changed the lives of generations of kids on Chicago's North Side. With a mission to provide area youth with the support, resources, guidance, and opportunities that can position them for academic and life-long success, the High Ridge Chargers Football and Cheer Club has helped over 10,000 at-risk students from the area stay "off the streets and on the field" since 1959.

"Some people live their entire lives searching for their purpose, and our responsibility as an organization is to equip our kids with the keys to unlock the doors leading to a meaningful and purpose-filled life," says Sam Robinson, the volunteer General Manager of the Chargers.

Now, with the assistance of Burke, Warren, the High Ridge Chargers can help unlock even more doors and build on their already-impressive record of developing young men and women of character and achievement. Working closely with the volunteer High Ridge Chargers leadership, the firm's attorneys recently secured 501(c)(3) non-profit status for the organization, allowing it to solicit and accept to tax-deductible donations for the first time in its 60-year history.

"The folks who dedicate countless hours to the High Ridge Chargers are an inspiration, not only to the kids who benefit from their support but to us as well," says Mary Kruit McWilliams, the Burke, Warren partner who led the firm's efforts on behalf of the Chargers. "We are so gratified that we could help them access the contributions and financial resources that will further enhance their ability to serve the community."

### **Positive Role Models, a Supportive Environment, and Accomplished Alumni**

Every year, over 250 at-risk youths, from a diverse range of ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds, 70% from single-parent households, participate in athletic, social, and academic programs through the High Ridge Chargers. While the Rogers Park-based program is centered around football and cheer, the all-volunteer staff of coaches, administrators, board members, and other supporters provide much more than a place to play.

"The High Ridge Chargers is about preparing our kids for a safe, healthy, successful, and productive life; we just use football, cheer, and dance as a tool to pull them in and as a vehicle for them to advance," Robinson says.



High Ridge Chargers facilitates these objectives by providing positive role models, structure, and essential life lessons in a fun, supportive environment that places a high priority on teamwork, discipline, responsibility, and the invaluable benefits of being a student-athlete.

Charger players have gone on to excel in college football programs across the country, with several reaching it to the NFL. Over 250 High Ridge alumni have earned life-changing scholarships from prestigious universities, and the vast majority of High Ridge students have gone on to successful careers in a wide range of businesses, professions, and trades.

The Chargers football and cheer squads have won numerous state and national championships. The program prides itself on developing the whole individual with a clear emphasis on academic success. Volunteers help students with their homework and visit their schools to ensure that team members are achieving a C-average or better.

### **Powered by Volunteers But In Need of Financial Resources**

For decades, High Ridge has depended on volunteers to make it go. Whether driving players to their games, selling fundraising goods, working the refreshment tent, or moving the chains, volunteers make the Chargers possible. But all of that sweat equity, while invaluable, wasn't enough for the program to reach its full potential and continue serving area youth.

For most of the organization's history, financial and in-kind gifts were not tax-deductible, limiting High Ridge's ability to attract institutional or individual donors. The board recognized that obtaining non-profit status from the IRS was the key to tapping into the generosity of those who support High Ridge's mission. The board also knew that creating the financial statements and organization documentation needed to apply for tax-free status would require time and expertise that the volunteer staff did not have.

A retired financial executive whose son had prospered from his involvement with the Chargers connected the board with Burke, Warren to assist them with their 501(c)(3) efforts.

Under the leadership of Burke, Warren's McWilliams, and with the hard work of Robinson and David Roti, an analyst at Fellowes Brands, the project team worked through the intricacies of the application requirements. Burke Warren attorneys assembled records to patiently built the foundation that would allow the Chargers to obtain tax-exempt status. On September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the IRS notified High Ridge that its application was approved and that it was now free to accept tax-deductible charitable donations.

Burke, Warren is proud of its efforts on behalf of the High Ridge Chargers and encourages others to support this tremendous institution as it continues changing the lives of young men and women throughout our community. For more information, contact Mary Kruit McWilliams at (312) 840-7081/ [mmcwilliams@burkelaw.com](mailto:mmcwilliams@burkelaw.com).