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USTA Serves, the National Charitable Foundation of the United States Tennis Association, today announced it has awarded grants to Inner City Tennis Clinic, Inc. (ICTC) in Painesville, Ohio, and University of Akron Research Foundation in Akron, Ohio. During its 2012 spring funding cycle, USTA Serves awarded 44 community tennis and education organizations more than $400,000 in grants.

ICTC’s programs inspire positive character development, strive to build a life-long love of fitness and teach good nutrition and healthy eating habits. They accomplish this through the vehicle of sport, specifically tennis. ICTC has hosted the Northside Initiative since 2007. The free program provides positive experiences for youth with the most need, in the toughest neighborhoods of North Minneapolis and introduces them to tennis.

“We are thankful to the USTA for their support,” said Brian Smallwood, Inner City Tennis’ Executive Director. “The funds will help support our operations so we can continue to provide instruction, classes and activities for these deserving youth.”

The USTA Serves award will support ICTC’s free tennis lessons, health and nutrition education and fitness solutions for more than 400 at-risk Cleveland children, ages 6-16, during the summer of 2012.

In addition, the USTA Serves’ award has granted $10,000 in support of the University of Akron Research Foundation’s PACE program. The PACE program is a six-week in-school program that teaches tennis to disadvantaged, special-needs youth from Akron Public Schools (APS).

“Our goal is to serve all levels of Akron public school children, even those in junior high and high school, but especially those in the 16 Akron elementary schools that have not had any PACE programming from 2009-2012,” said Mary J. MacCracken, Ph. D, University of Akron Professor and PACE project leader. “We are thrilled USTA Serves will help us to continue the program and to reach these additional students.”

The purpose of the program is to grow the game of tennis by introducing the sport and its related life lessons to more than 5,000 APS youth during the 2012-2013 school year.

“USTA Serves is proud to continue to provide financial resources to organizations impacting the future of thousands of children throughout the nation, helping them to develop life skills through tennis and education,” says Deborah Slaner Larkin, Executive Director, USTA Serves. “It is our hope and belief that these young men and women will continue to positively impact their communities and beyond.”

The bi-annual grant process, a national initiative of USTA Serves, was developed to provide disadvantaged, at-risk children the opportunity to learn to play tennis and improve their academic skills in a structured format, and to help combat childhood obesity by promoting healthy lifestyles. Chosen by a Grant Proposal Review Committee comprised of Foundation board members and USTA national staff, with important input from USTA sections, the grants are awarded to programs that successfully combine tennis and education and help children pursue their goals and highest dreams by leading healthier lives, succeeding in school and becoming healthier citizens. To date, USTA Serves has disbursed $11 million to a variety of programs that support its mission.