



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**February 28, 2022**

## **FORMER NFL PLAYER RETURNS HOME TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR LOCAL YOUTH**

**Uniontown, PA** – Even when Will James was a world away from Fayette County, pursuing a career in football, the Laurel Highlands graduate knew he wanted to come back home one day and make a difference in the lives of young people.

James graduated from high school in 1997 and headed to the University of Michigan, where he was immediately struck by the difference in his new lifestyle.

“When I got there, the world looked like a whole different place from growing up here in Brownsville, Uniontown, Fayette County,” he said. “I remember thinking I wanted to go back one day to let other kids know there’s more to life than what we see here in Fayette County. I always had the desire to bring something back that would impact a young me.”

After finishing college and moving on to a professional football career that would span about a decade, James did just that. He left the NFL in 2010 and returned to Brownsville, where he founded TeamHumanity, a for-profit business aimed at teaching underserved youth about economics that has since evolved into a nonprofit community endeavor focused on education and enrichment.

His dedication to making an impact on underserved youth in Fayette County, particularly within the African-American community, has earned James the title of February “Face” in the Fayette County Public Relations Initiative’s Faces and Places series.

“TeamHumanity started as a clothing company,” James said. “One thing I realized early on as I was making trips back and forth to New York, I could tell the economy had tanked. I wanted to make a brand that would generate a revolution and, in so doing, could also teach skills.”

James got local high school students involved in the production of the clothing in an effort to help them develop workforce and life skills.

“I wanted them to see that we could be producers and not just consumers, and make changes that way,” he said.

What began as a for-profit company soon developed an entire nonprofit arm that now encompasses the TeamHumanity games, as well as a community learning center and a community garden, all based in Brownsville.

The TeamHumanity games is an annual event in which local kids and their families come together to play flag football, connect with their community, and just have fun.

Verticals Community Learning Center is a newer initiative that aims to provide young people in underserved areas with opportunities they may not otherwise have. The Learning Center is divided into two sides, one geared toward sciences and the other geared toward arts.

“TeamHumanity – all the goodwill and all the on-the-ground impact and raising funds and building relationships over the years – we sensed it was time to create a center for the youth,” James said.

James said Verticals will teach kids a host of skills, with technologically-focused courses in everything from robotics and computer coding to photography and videography. There even will be a master class, where kids can observe a professional in their field of interest.

Arts-based courses will include graphic design, screen printing, embroidery and sewing, vinyl cutting, and more. The community garden, just three blocks from the building that houses Verticals, will be the site of classes in horticulture.

Introductory courses in emerging technology begin in early March and are divided into age groups, with Lego Spikes aimed at kids in kindergarten through second grade. Robomaster S1 is for kids in grades 3-5 and allows them to build robots, learn coding and how to program those robots, and compete with each other. A class titled Drones in the Workplace for grades 6-8 will prepare kids for their Federal Aviation Administration certification, and an NFT Fundamentals course for grades 9-12 will teach kids how to create NFTs, as well as how to sell them.

Introductory courses will be held once a week for six weeks.

“If you give them knowledge, they’ll run with it,” James said.

To further – and share – his own knowledge of his community, James attended the Blue Zones Project® community assessment seminar held at Penn State Fayette in October.

“I know a lot of the issues here firsthand,” he said. “With Blue Zones, I was excited about being invited because I felt like I could give some voice to those in different communities. I’m familiar with the problems on the ground in black communities.”

James said he is anticipating the project’s analysis of Fayette County.

“I’m looking forward to seeing the numbers,” he said.

The Fayette Living Well Coalition is working with the Blue Zones Project, a community wellbeing initiative, to maximize the longevity and good health of Fayette County residents.

To learn more about TeamHumanity, visit [www.shopteamhumanity.com](http://www.shopteamhumanity.com). To learn more about the Verticals Community Learning Center, visit [www.verticalsclc.com](http://www.verticalsclc.com).

###

*This communication is part of the Fayette County PR Initiative, which is funded through the 2016 Fayette County Local Share Account (LSA) in cooperation with the Fayette County Board of Commissioners, Fayette Chamber of Commerce, The Redevelopment Authority of the County of Fayette, The Redstone Foundation and other partners. This funding has been designated for the continued promotion and marketing of Fayette County, PA.*

For more information, contact Kristi Rooker Kassimer, Public Relations Specialist, at 412-691-0262, [kkassimer@fayettecountypa.info](mailto:kkassimer@fayettecountypa.info) or Jamie Rankin, Journalist, at 724-434-4486, [jamierankin13@gmail.com](mailto:jamierankin13@gmail.com).