

FRIENDS LAUNCH A ROAR-ING CAMPAIGN FOR VICTIM OF GUNSHOT

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By Justina Wang – Staff Writer



After Richard Winfrey's friends heard he had been seriously wounded, they didn't collect flowers or teddy bears to send to the hospital.

They brought him lions.

Those closest to the East Aurora High School senior had wanted to comfort him after the shooting last weekend, but they knew what Winfrey really needed was strength.

"You need to have the courage to fight," Clayton Muhammad, a mentor to the teen, recalled telling him in the hospital. "You need to have the strength of a lion."

During a meeting of the Boys II Men Fraternity, an anti-gang organization that Muhammad leads and Winfrey belongs to, the group decided to launch a campaign to ask community members to pray for their friend, donate money to help his family, and help fill his hospital room with stuffed lions that would remind him to stay strong. They named the campaign R.O.A.R. (Reach Out and Act for Richard).

With the help of their sister group, the Diamonds Sorority, they spread the word among their families and through school hallways. By Tuesday, Muhammad said, they had already collected several dozen lions.

"You just see the kids who he's impacted getting up and moving to put forth this campaign," said Muhammad, also the East Aurora School District's director of community relations. "We're doing it for him. We need him to constantly see that image of strength."

Aurora police said two men were shot while driving at 11:22 a.m. last Friday -- when classes were out for a teacher institute day -- and their car crashed into a tree in the 0-99 block of North Farnsworth Avenue. Police would not release the names of the victims, saying the investigation is ongoing, but friends say Winfrey was one of the victims.

Muhammad said doctors told Winfrey, who was on the high school golf team and in the band and choir that he would be paralyzed from the neck down.

"But (on Monday) he moved his fingers for the first time," Muhammad said. "So we know that prayer works and it strengthens."

A fund for the family has been set up at Old Second Bank in Aurora. To donate, make checks payable to "The Winfrey Family Trust Fund" and drop them off at Old Second or any East Aurora school.

Stuffed lions for Winfrey can be dropped off at any district school or at the School Service Center, 417 Fifth St.

For more information on how to help, call Muhammad at (630) 299-5566.