

Winter Haven PAL program seeks \$60,000 juvenile justice grant

By ART SILLS
Staff writer

WINTER HAVEN — Winter Haven's redesigned Police Athletic League is in the running for a \$60,000 Juvenile Justice Partnership Program grant, Police Chief Ron Martin said Friday.

The city is among 90 finalists for 33 grants.

The city police department's bid for the grant is part of a major overhaul of the PAL program, which operated for several years as a privately-run organization. The city-owned PAL gym building is located at 203 Ave. R, N.E.

In what the police chief described as a "public-private partnership," the new

PAL will "expand dramatically" the number of participants in a wide range of cultural and recreation activities for children and young adults.

The Winter Haven program was formerly operated, without any direct link to the police department, as a recreation program focused on boxing. The operation was directed by Jack Leonard, a veteran pro boxing promoter.

The city commission last year earmarked \$10,000 for the PAL program, but the allocation hinged on its reorga-

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nization and direction by the city police department.

In a Friday report to commissioners, Martin said the department has taken over PA. operations, using the \$10,000 in city funds to "keep the doors open" at the Avenue R facility.

The program is serving "an average of 20 children and adults daily, with 30 children on the weekends," the report said. "The participants are learning about

boxing and weight training, sportsmanship and fair play."

"Due to lack of equipment, other needed programs have not yet been implemented," the chief's report said.

When the local program is chartered by state and national PAL organizations, it will be eligible for a \$2,000 grant from the Florida PAL organization, Martin said.

Under the proposed incorporation of the Winter Haven PAL, the city's mayor, police chief and leisure services department director will serve among its six founders.