

## VA Lions Football Program Welcomes Homeschoolers

VaHomeschoolers member Nancy Warner informed us that her family is involved in starting a new community-based tackle football program in Loudoun County, noting that the group doesn't limit participation to Loudoun County residents, "this is simply our current 'base of operations' and our practices are currently in the Sterling area." The football program is "open to homeschooled, private and public schooled boys 14 – 18 years old. We are also offering cheerleading for girls 12 – 18. Even though the season is about to begin, we are still welcoming new players."

Nancy said that she read Celeste Land's article in the July-August 2007 VaHomeschoolers Newsletter, "in which one of the suggestions was to establish a sports team in the community," and "this is exactly what our team, the VA Lions, is all about." The VaHomeschoolers member put us in touch with Le'Shon Owens, Athletic Director of the VA Lions. Le'Shon provided background information, including that she began creating the program after her son's interest in playing football was challenged by inaccessibility to join the local public high school team as a student at a private school.

The family discovered that public schools rarely allow non-public school students access to sports. Like other parents have done, the Owenses "began to consider what seemed to be our only option: send our son to public school simply for the sake of him playing ball." However, they felt it "a futile reason to send him to public school," especially after the "extreme consideration and preparation taken to remove him in the first place." So, "after much prayer, advice, and encouragement," Le'Shon decided to start a community-based football team. Her vision became the LIONS Football Program.

Le'Shon said that she was "not alone in my desire to keep my child involved in a sport he loves so much, without sacrificing our convictions," and this solution offers a sports option for any boy who wants to play football, however he is educated.

Le'Shon states that while the program's "policies are based on Christian principles, our organization is indeed community based," with "an open door policy," in which "everyone is welcome." The Lions' Athletic Director said that the program has "organized/group prayer," but it is not mandatory, as "the players may feel free to take a moment of silence instead" or are welcome to "step away from the group prayer," if that is more comfortable.

The program also allows enrollment for cheerleaders, and is still accepting "walk-ons for both football and cheerleading." The Athletic Director noted that they "currently have a team of 16," which is enough for a good season, but their goal is "to have a **ROARING** season!"

The VA Lions sports program is based in the Loudoun area, but accepts players from all over, and seeks to expand into other counties, and possibly field another team. In addition, the group is considering the possibility of creating more opportunities, such as baseball, lacrosse, basketball, and volleyball. Le'Shon noted that the group's ultimate goal is to "let the players play," and that the organization is "focused on much more than recreation. We are driving to motivate and mentor

those who participate. Moreover, we are determined to prepare and position the players for the collegiate level," and the Lions take that seriously.