

NFL YET aviation students awed to be part of 2023 Super Bowl Breakfast event



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NFL YET, a K-12 charter school in south Phoenix that was born out of the first Super Bowl held in the Valley in 1996, will have a place at the table for Super Bowl 57.

On Saturday, 30 students in the school's aviation program, which was launched this year, will dress up in formal attire for a Super Bowl breakfast ceremony on character at the JW Marriott Desert Ridge.

The 2023 Super Bowl Breakfast will be held from 8-10 a.m. Minnesota Vikings quarterback Kirk Cousins will receive the Bart Starr Award at the event, for serving as a positive role model to his family, teammates and community. Super Bowl champion coach Tony Dungy will be part of the program.

"We initially got a table and planned to take six or seven students," said Anastacia Europa, Chief Operating Officer of Espiritu Schools. "We started a new program this year with students through visual simulators going through an aviation program to have the opportunity to graduate with a private pilot's certification.

"We were able to get 30 aviation students to come. They were so excited, almost shocked."



Europa said that First International Bank & Trust and San Juan Diego Institute and Flight Path Vectors helped make it possible for the school's aviation students to attend.

Armando Ruiz, who is CEO and Servant Leader at NFL YET, said the first NFL YET was in Los Angeles, followed by New Orleans and Phoenix.

"The concept was still fluid when the first Super Bowl was held here," Ruiz said. "Everyone was still trying to develop a model for inspiring urban youth to pursue education.

"Obviously, one of the early concerns of the concept was how to sustain it long-term after the initial Legacy grant of the local Super Bowl. I think this later led to the decision of having most of the NFL YETs partner with existing Boys and Girls Clubs."

Ruiz said an innovative approach was offered to create a charter school that could sustain the concept many years after the Super Bowl made the initial financial commitment.

"We happened to fit the criteria of that moment," Ruiz said. "We offered a long-term financially sustainable education project. We were in south Phoenix and we had a history of working with young minority, urban youth to stay in school.

"I can't say it's been easy. But I think it has transformed the south Phoenix community. It has accomplished everything we dreamed of at the beginning. We have impacted thousands of kids' lives by educating them and inspiring them to stay in school."

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And to produce the next generation of community leaders, the aviation program was born.

For most, they've never stepped foot in an airport before, let alone flown on an airplane.

And this Saturday's breakfast, Europa said, aligns with NFL YET's values, building character and leadership. Some of the aviation students who will be attending played on NFL YET's football team that competes in the AIA's 2A conference.

"One of the reasons we started the aviation program is because our students have not grown up thinking, 'I want to be a pilot,' " Europa said. "It's primarily to expose them to an industry where, I think, 5% of the pilots are Hispanic and about 8% are women. They come from hard-working communities, a

lot of immigrant families, lower social-economic situations. We're a Title 1 school. That's the demographics. They are certainly under-represented in the aviation industry."

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Jose Melero, marketing coordinator for Espiritu Schools, said the students couldn't believe it when they found out they'd have a table for a Super Bowl function.

"It's not something common," he said. "Most of them play on the NFL YET football team. They love the sport. They love the people. They knew about the people.

"They were worried about finding tuxedos. I told them, 'We can find a way to have a suit and tie for them.' We compare it to a wedding, something huge. It's something to give to our students."

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