



DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
QUEENS COUNTY  
125-01 QUEENS BOULEVARD  
KEW GARDENS, NEW YORK 11415-1568  
718-286-6000

**RICHARD A. BROWN**  
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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**CONTACT: PRESS OFFICE**  
(718)286-6315

**D.A. BROWN PRESENTS AWARDS TO TWO TOP NATIONAL TENNIS CENTER OFFICIALS FOR THEIR WORK ON BEHALF OF HIS STAR TRACK PROGRAM TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE IN FAR ROCKAWAY**

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown yesterday hosted a ceremony in recognition of the assistance provided by the United States Tennis Association and the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center – and, in particular, NTC officials Tina Taps and Whitney Kraft – for all of their hard work in helping to make his school anti-violence efforts in Far Rockaway a success.

District Attorney Brown said, “For more than 10 years the United States Tennis Association and the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center have been our faithful partners in our annual ‘Say Yes to Tennis; No to Violence Day’ at the National Tennis Center in Flushing Meadow. Today, we present Public Service Awards to the Manager of National Tennis Center Programs Tina Taps and its Director of Tennis Whitney Kraft, who together literally turn this event into a reality each year.”

Tina Taps brings 29 years of experience to the National Tennis Center. As manager of NTC Programs and Professional Staff, she is in charge of managing various aspects of the USTA’s involvement in the professional sport, including the U.S. Open. Whitney Kraft is a 25 year veteran of the game of tennis. Prior to joining the National Tennis Center team, he served as Director of Tennis for the City of Fort Lauderdale, where he oversaw the daily programming and operations of more than 45 courts at nine different facilities.

The “Say Yes to Tennis; No to Violence Day” is the culmination each year of District Attorney Brown’s STAR (Straight Talk About Risks) Track anti-violence program. The program involves assistant district attorneys and assistant corporation counsel working with children at nine schools in Far Rockaway to teach them about the risks of drugs and guns in partnership with educators and parents. The program uses a curriculum designed to drive down the crime rate and build up self-esteem, confidence and the quality of life. At the end of each school year, the students who participate in STAR Track – as many as 900 in number – are treated to a day-long event at the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center during which they are given introductory tennis instruction, participate in on-court activities with National Tennis Center Pros, and receive t-shirts and lunch.

District Attorney Brown said, “The annual event could not happen without the dedication of Tina Taps, who has supported us since the beginning, and the hard work of Whitney Kraft, who has supported the event since joining the NTC staff. Tina is a real treasure and she has a very special place in our hearts. When Whitney became the NTC’s Director of Tennis, he understood right away the event’s importance and what it means to the students who participate in it.”

District Attorney Brown said, “Since I am an avid tennis fan, a special event featuring tennis seemed a perfect choice for celebrating the end of the school year. It shows our students an enjoyable and constructive ways to spend their time and serves as a model of important values like teamwork and sportsmanship. Some of the students have gone on to play tennis at their schools or at one of the many New York Junior Tennis League programs.”

The USTA is the national governing body for the sport of tennis in the United States and the leader in promoting and developing the growth of tennis at every level – from local communities to the highest level of the professional game. It owns and operates the US Open, the largest annually attended sporting event in the world, and launched the US Open Series linking 10 summer tournaments to the US Open. A not-for-profit organization with more than 665,000 members, the USTA invests 100 percent of its proceeds in growing the game. In addition it owns 94 Pro Circuit events throughout the United States, and selects the teams for the Davis Cup, Fed Cup, Olympic and Paralympic Games.

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