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Career assist leader

At Dorchester Y, mentor, mentee realize importance of backup plan

It seems those of us who watch Boston sporting events from our prime seats, mere feet from the action, accustomed to our nightly view, take the cherished moments for granted, overlooking the privilege of our position.

Meanwhile, there are fans who scrape up their monies, pool resources, take advantage of online bargains, and even borrow money just for the opportunity to catch a game from the “nosebleed” section.

For Andrew Angus, it was Section 305 at TD Garden and seeing the top of Kevin Garnett’s shiny, sweat-laden, bald head chug down the court after a pick-and-roll layup. That was his Celtics experience. The former Salem State soccer player tried to attend as many games as he could but his most important priorities were at the Dorchester YMCA, where he is the sports coordinator.

The 30-year-old Angus was in Atlanta when he received a call from his 19-year-old mentee, David Lovett, a former Dorchester High basketball player who was encouraged by Angus to avoid negative influences by replacing his hoop dreams with book dreams. Lovett, now a freshman at Bunker Hill Community College, was asked to speak at the YMCA of Greater Boston’s Dream Big Party in October. He talked about not only Angus’s guidance but how he has served as a mentor himself to kids whose sole goal is to become the next LeBron James or Rajon Rondo. There is no Plan B.

Lovett didn’t have a Plan B either, until he met Angus. That experience led to his moving speech at the gala. At a charity auction moments after the speech, a couple bid successfully on a $1,000 Celtics ticket package to the April 16 season finale against the Washington Wizards that included premium seats, dinner at the Courtside Club, and parking passes. The couple, Jack and Eileen Connors, presented the package to Lovett.

And his first choice was to invite Angus. Angus said he saw himself in Lovett, an affable kid who perhaps put too much emphasis on basketball during high school. When the scholarship offers didn’t pour in, when he wasn’t one of ESPN’s top 100 recruits, he had no other options. A college education was a fleeting consideration; the most viable option was hanging with friends and trying to figure out his future on the fly.

“There’s a certain type of uniqueness about him,” Angus said of Lovett. “He’s always polite. More importantly, he’s from the community. I saw a lot of kids who used to look up to him because of the way he carries himself. There were little chime-ins where I can say ‘do this’ or ‘do that’ and keep him focused on a certain task.

“You meet teens that are wonderful. You meet some that are very hard to deal with but you know they’ve got to cross that hump and you’ve got to be patient with them.”

The two played hoops at the YMCA and Angus took an interest in Lovett’s path. He asked him whether college was an option. It wasn’t. He asked if Lovett had thought about life after basketball. He hadn’t. He asked Lovett if he had any idea of how to prepare for adulthood. He didn’t.

Lovett’s a soft-spoken kid with a bright smile. He loves basketball but wasn’t really sure what else he loved.

“Not even sure,” Lovett said when asked about his future before he met Angus. “College was not much of an option but I looked at it. My main focus was what I was going to do after basketball season.”

“[Angus] gave me a lot of information. He is a guy who kept asking questions and as time progressed I realized he was the guy who always had answers. He was feeding me all this knowledge.”

Bunker Hill was Lovett’s choice and he has warmed to the college environment. He said he is more confident in his ability to flourish academically, not just athletically. Most of Lovett’s growth occurred in his long-term goals. He is no longer limited by his neighborhood or environment. There is more to life than what he has seen.

While many of us are blessed enough to watch the game from such close up we can see the beads of sweat on Garnett’s head, others view life from Section 305, uncertain if there will be an opportunity to upgrade, uncertain if life will offer a different option than what they have already experienced.

“At this age, I’m old enough to know the differences between right and wrong. As I have matured, I realize that this is real, this is it,” said Lovett, who said he received two
A's among his most recent grades. "You're done with high school and all you want to do is just sit around, that's not the best idea. I'm happy where I'm at."

Angus's mentoring has rubbed off on Lovett, who works with younger YMCA patrons at the center's Brunch and Basketball Program sponsored by Omega Psi Phi fraternity.

While Lovett is running ball with some of those eighth- and ninth-graders, they approach him with some of the same life questions he asked Angus.

"I don't want children to know what I did in high school, sometimes being a fool in class," Lovett said, "It's a [positive] image I know I have to keep. I have to stay positive. I have to be the mature one, the older one."

April 16 was a special night for the duo. Neither had ever watched a Celtics game from such a premium proximity. Said Angus: "You dream of watching a game that close. You said whoever is down there got money. We always think you have to be some type of important person to be down courtside or a rap star."

On that night, there was plenty of space for an impactful mentor and his mentee.

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When David Lovett (left) needed guidance, his mentor, Andrew Angus stood by him.

Andrew Angus (left) lends some pointers to former Dorchester High basketball player David Lovett at the Dorchester Y.
Residents volunteer as mentors

Corey Gilchrist and Britton Lense, of Brighton, have volunteered as mentors for the John Andrew Mazie Memorial Foundation (JAMMF), a nonprofit organization that operates the Mazie Mentoring Program and is dedicated to transforming at-risk or disadvantaged youth into adults of promise.

Founded in 1998, the unique scholarship and mentoring program pairs high school students who are at-risk of not fulfilling their potential with adult mentors who can help them thrive. Youth are selected for the program by school officials. The mentors are all volunteers who motivate students to work toward a better future while empowering them to have trusting relationships with adults.

Gilchrist and Lense were each matched with a sophomore at Framingham High School. For the next five semesters, the duos will work together to fulfill two community service requirements, set academic and career-oriented goals for the students, and research the college application process. They will meet at least eight hours each month to participate in Mazie sponsored and individual activities that will expose them to new social, cultural and educational experiences.

Mentors of the program help students to improve their academic standing, graduate from high school and experience earned success. In turn, mentors are often inspired by their mentees and find volunteering for the Mazie Mentoring Program to be a rewarding experience.

In the last 16 years, the Mazie Mentoring Program has helped more than 500 young people go on to lead more fulfilled and successful lives. More than 90 percent of Mazie mentees graduate from high school and more than 70 percent go on to college or other post-secondary training programs.

Applications for new mentors are always being accepted. For more information, to donate or to become a mentor, visit www.mazie.org or contact Lowell Mazie, executive director at maziefdn@comcast.net.
BOND OF BROTHERS

Margery EAGAN

In the same church where the funeral of firefighter Michael Kennedy took place yesterday, Susan Eastman of West Roxbury spoke last week about the rare generosity of Kennedy and Lt. Ed Walsh — not just as firefighters but as men.

"It all makes me want to be a better person," she said.

That's a fitting epitaph for Michael Kennedy as the 33-year-old firefighter was laid to rest yesterday.

An inspiration to do better may be the lasting legacies of both fallen firefighters.

Wearing the blazer, slacks and tie Kennedy's mother, Kathy, bought him Monday, a somber-faced Alex Beauzile walked slowly down the center aisle of Holy Name Church yesterday to present the gifts at the altar for the man he loved, and who loved him back.

For seven years Kennedy was a "big brother" to Alex, who's 14 now and lives in Milton. "Alex and Mike together were like Disney World," said Alex's mother, Genie, after the funeral. "We weren't related as blood but he made it seem like that. He gave Alex things I couldn't as a single mother."

Playing video games and pickup basketball, snowboarding, watching sports, going to Celtics games and Six Flags in Agawam. Once, when Alex got in trouble, Kennedy applied a little tough love: He had Alex fill buckets with rocks as Kennedy landscaped in his backyard. "It showed me that what I did was wrong," Alex told the Herald two days after Kennedy was killed. "The next time I just calmed down."

Alex's mother said yesterday, "At the wake and funeral I kept hearing about 'the rocks, the rocks.' I'm like, wow, this man let everybody know about Alex. As a mother it's an honor to feel such love and understanding. That even through hard times, everything is going to be all right because the light has to shine."

And shine the light has. Since the story of Alex and Michael Kennedy made the news, "There's been an amazing response from Michael's friends and firefighters wanting to become big brothers," said Nora Leary of Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Massachusetts. It's also come from regular Joes and Janes, said Deborah Re, of Big Sisters of Greater Boston.

The waiting list is still very long, Re said. Eight hundred boys between 7 and 12 are waiting for mentors, as are 350 girls between 8 and 15. But Re said they've just found a possible match for Alex's sister Gabby, 13. Leary said the Big Brothers are planning to meet with Alex and his mother when the time is right to see if he wants another big brother.

Losing Kennedy, Alex's mother said yesterday, has been hard for her son. "He used to tell me, 'When I get to certain age, mommy, I'm gonna move to Mike's house,'" she said. "That will not happen now, he understands. But the memories will last forever."

Firefighter Michael R. Kennedy, she said, "was the best gift my son ever had."

Erin Smith contributed to this report.
LEGACY OF SERVICE: Alex Beazile takes part in the funeral for 'big brother' Michael R. Kennedy.
By Lindsay Pykosz
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On a windy and rainy Tuesday afternoon late last month, a handful of Nantucket High School students made the short walk over to the elementary school to tutor groups of fourth- and fifth-graders in English and math.

The goal of the new mentoring program spearheaded by David Zieff, executive director of Mentoring Youth Nantucket (formerly Big Brothers Big Sisters), is to provide assistance to third- through fifth-grade students with homework and MCAS standardized-test tutoring for those who scored in the “failing” or “needs improvement” categories.

Since the program began after the new year, 100 elementary-school students and 31 high-school students have signed up to participate, Zieff said.

“We were looking to start a new program,” Zieff said of the organization that runs traditional one-on-one mentoring programs as well as Breakfast Buddies, in which high-school students have breakfast with elementary-school students in the cafeteria. “CES associate principal) Mike Horton and I got together and were talking about starting tutoring for the elementary school, and as it happened, they have two programs already in place. One is Mondays and Thursdays, the homework club, and the other is Tuesday and Wednesday for MCAS tutoring.”

Monday through Thursday, the group meets from 2:30-4 p.m. in different clusters throughout the school. Students were identified by need based on last year’s MCAS scores, like we can expand to include more NES students if the volunteers keep up consistent attendance,” he said.

Horton said. A high-school student can choose to assist with either English or basic math, depending on what they’re most comfortable with.

Zieff said that the program is just as rewarding for the high-school students, who can gain confidence in the two subjects and then carry that through to their own studies in high school and beyond.

“The high school kids get just as much out of it,” he said. “And through our Breakfast Buddies program, in the last year, I know of two or three kids who were in that program, graduated high school and now are doing one-to-one mentoring in college.”

Senior Quinn Waddell said the program is very rewarding, but she was particularly excited when she found out that it counted toward the 20 hours of community service she needs in order to graduate. Having recently moved to the island from Randolph, Vt., she participated in a similar program in her old district.

“I like helping them with their homework,” she said. “I like helping them figure out certain things and see them learn. I usually sit at a table with five students and we’ll do 15 minutes of different homework help and activities.”

Waddell walks to the elementary school Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday each week.

The partnership between both schools has allowed the homework- and MCAS-assistance programs to grow and expand in just over a month.

“We are off to a great start and I am pleased how much the high-school students are helping the program be more successful and of better quality, not to mention the fact that it looks
‘Little Brother’ mourns Kennedy

By Brad Cole
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Bos ton firefighter
Michael Kennedy was more
than just a “Big Brother” to
Alex Beaulise, 14, of Milton.
The duo did everything
together, from attending
Celtics games to eating
Thanksgiving dinner to snowboarding.

“There are just so many
memories. The best
memories we have are them
laughing and smiling,” said
Alex’s mother Genie Morel-
lus. “It was like Disney
World. Whenever Alex
came home, he’d say he
had such a great time. It
was always unforgettable
enjoyment.”

Kennedy was a Boston
firefighter who died in a
nine-alarm fire on Beacon
Street on Wednesday,
March 26. The news came
as a shock to Morelus and
had an immediate impact
son Alex.

“When I told my kids, I
said put your jackets on,
we’re going next door to
your aunt’s house. I have to
tell you something,” Morel-
lus said. “When I told Alex,
he said ‘Oh my God, this is
not true, this is not true. I
want to sleep.’

Genie took Alex to the
International House of
Pancakes to get his favorite
breakfast, chocolate pane-
cakes, the next day. The
IHOP held too many mem-
ories - Mike and Alex had
eaten there numerous times
before, and Alex was unable
to eat. It wasn’t until late
Thursday evening he could
stomach the pancakes.

“(Mike) played a big role.
He was a Big Brother, but
also like a father figure to
Alex. You could tell, if he
ever had a child, he would
be an excellent father,”
Morelus said. “With him,
you couldn’t go wrong. He
was like a family member.”

Alex and Mike did so
much together, many
things Morelus wouldn’t
have been able to do. She
admits she isn’t knowl-
edgable about athletics, so
Mike was essential in help-
ing Alex suit up and buying
the proper equipment for
basketball and football. He
knew things about sports
that she said she would have
simply overlooked.

One day, after buying
some equipment for football
with Mike, Alex came home
with an athletic supporter.

“I didn’t know he’d have
to wear a cup. When he
came home with it, I was
like, ‘Alex, what is this?’ He
said it was for protection,”
Morelus said.

In addition to Alex’s
games, Mike and Alex often
attended Boston sports
games, including several
Boston Celtics and Boston
Red Sox games.

“Mike and Alex were
really close, and they had
a lot of fun together,” Nora
Leary, vice president of
program services with Big
Brothers Big Sisters said.
“We’re deeply saddened.
Our first thoughts and con-
cerns were for Mike and
his family and Alex and his
family.”

Out of all the activities
they did together, Alex said
he favorite came on Aug.
10, 2009, the day after his
birthday. Mike took Alex
to Six Flags for a day at the
amusement park.

“It was the first day he
told me he loved me,” Alex
said.

Kennedy joined Big
Brothers Big Sisters seven
years ago, after returning
from his Marine service in
Iraq.

“We’re really thankful for
the time Mike gave us as a
Big Brother and our prayers
go out to his family,” Leary
said. “Some of Mike’s friends
have called us. People are
thinking about becoming
a Big Brother in his honor.”

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From left, firefighter Michael Kennedy sits with his Little Brother Alex Beauzile. COURTESY PHOTO / WCVB