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Greenfield re-establishes Youth Commission

By ANITA FRITZ
Recorder Staff

GREENFIELD — Mayor William Martin said he would like to see the town’s newly re-established Youth Commission work with agencies in the area to determine what the town should be offering its youth and what others are doing for them so services are not duplicated.

"I'll be working with the new commission to see what is already here for kids and what's not," he said. "The town may end up re-establishing a youth services department some day or it may realize that the youth of Greenfield are already being served."

Martin said the commission, which is made up of seven volunteers, will not cost the town anything.

"Who knows, the town may end up working with others to create a boys and girls club or something," said Martin. "We want to make sure there's plenty for our youth to do."

Town Council has accepted Martin's choice of commissioners and that group, which consists of seven Greenfield residents, will begin its work immediately.

Martin said it will be working with service agencies and looking at the town's parks and what types of activities could be planned for the town's youth there.

The town's former Youth Commission disbanded several years ago when Martin eliminated the town's Youth Services Department and closed the skate park on Olive Street.

Since then, people have stepped forward to advocate for the town's youth and for area skateboarders.

Katherine Merrigan, Bryan Dolan, Samantha McIver, Benjamin Miner, Theresa Adams, Nekke Ragoza and Maria Burge have accepted their appointments to the commission.

All have worked with area youths in some capacity. Merrigan worked for the Hampshire County sheriff's department for five years and has worked in the Trial Court for the past two years. Dolan has organized and advocated for the youth of Turners Falls for the past six years, was a member of that town's Skate Park Committee since 2008 and has been a mentor to many area youths.

McIver has a degree in early childhood education from Greenfield Community College and runs her own family day care. She has also worked for other day care centers.

Miner has been advocating for a new skate park in Greenfield for almost two years and Adams has directed Country Players' Youth Group Players.

Ragoza has taught drivers' education to area youth since 1985 and Burge served two terms on the town's previous Youth Commission. "We want to make sure our youth are being served the best we can serve them," said Martin.

"Who knows, the town may end up working with others to create a boys and girls club or something. We want to make sure there's plenty for our youth to do."

William Martin
Greenfield mayor
Organization: Become Big influence in child’s life

Closer Look

LYNN

BY CHRIS STEVENS
The Daily Item

There are 22 boys in Lynn waiting for a Big Brother and you think don’t have the time, the skills or the wherewithal to do the job.

Richard Greif begs to differ. “You’re not a parent, you’re not a teacher or a therapist. You’re a consistent presence... you offer social and emotional support...”

By Chris Stevens

Greif, the vice president of marketing, communications and community relations for Big Brother Big Sister of Massachusetts Bay, explained Greif, “You’re not a parent, you’re not a teacher or a therapist. You’re a consistent presence... you offer social and emotional support...”

You offer social and emotional support... you offer social and emotional support...

It’s about spending a couple of hours a couple of times a month with a child and making all the difference in the world, not just for the “Little” but also for the “Big,” Greif said.

A Big/Little story

Littles and Bigs are how Greif describes the people in the organization. He became a Big in the 1990s. He said he was working a full-time job but wanted to do something outside of that, something meaningful.

“I didn’t want to do just a one-time thing,” he added. “I wanted something where I thought I could make a difference.”

Greif said he liked the idea of a Big/Little relationship with someone. He learned along the way that it was also a great opportunity for him to grow as well.

He learned the importance of consistency in a child’s life, he said. He also learned that things he might take for granted, like spending the day at the beach or a museum or going for a bike ride, might actually be a big deal for a lower-income child who’s never ventured far from his neighborhood.

“I learned to really listen and that it was okay if I didn’t have all the answers,” he said. “Sometimes they need is a champion, an advocate, someone that is in their corner.”

He said he also learned patience.

Greif said the impact those few hours have on a child’s life can be tremendous. According to a study done by Harris Interactive, 77 percent of Littles reported doing better in school because of their Big. 76 percent said their Big helped them learn right from wrong and 90 percent said the relationship with their Big helped them make better choices throughout their childhood.

Greif said one day his Little said he wanted to live on his own in his own apartment one day, he said.

“How much would it cost, the kind of job he might need, education needed to get the job, he didn’t realize there were so many things that cost money,” he said.

Greif said he referred back to the conversation a lot in order to help his Little think things through.

His Little is now a working chef.

See BIG PAGE 8A

Big Brother Big Sister has been in the region for 60 years but nationally, the organization has been around for more than a century.

In 1902 a young New York City court clerk named Ernest Goeller noticed more and more boys were coming through the courtroom. He knew putting a caring adult in their lives could help many of the kids stay out of trouble.

By 1904 he organized his plan and founded Big Brother. Big Sister came shortly thereafter but Greif said boys typically wait longer for a match.

The boys seeking Bigs are typically 7 years old to 14 years old, elementary to middle school, he said. And the organization puts a lot of work into making the matches. They look at interests, age and compatibility because it’s not just about matching a child with a caring adult, it’s about matching a family, he said.

They prefer to match Littles when they’re young because the programs focus on reaching kids before serious problems arise. There is training and support offered to volunteers if sticky situations should arise, Greif added.

The average relationship lasts three years, but one-year matches are not unusual and there is a school program built on the school year, Greif said.

Sometimes the relationship ends simply because the Littles are sometimes transient.

“My Little moved 10 times but I wanted to do everything I could do to keep the relationship going,” Greif said.

They age out of the program at 18 but Greif said he knows some of the matches remain close even after the program ends.

“It’s a really unique way to have an ongoing way of making a difference not just in a child’s life but in your own,” he said. “Really, you just need to show up and be a friend.”
A Big need

According to Wendy Foster, CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters, there are currently more than 2,000 “who are inspiring youth across Massachusetts Bay to achieve their full potential.”

But there are also more than 800 boys waiting to be matched, she added. Greif said the organization always needs more volunteers to step up. It’s a fine line between wanting to help all kids and not stacking the waiting list with too many kids.

“It’s really fun and it’s an easy way to make a difference in the community,” Greif said. “A lot of people think you have to be really successful or have accomplished something great in life but that’s really not the case.”

If you have experienced life and have at least two hours twice a month to spare you can be a Big Brother and there are at least 22 boys locally who are waiting for you.

For more information on Big Brothers Big Sisters of Massachusetts Bay visit http://www.bbsmb.org.

Chris Stevens may be reached at cstevens@itemlive.com.
Lynn Big Brother: Being a mentor makes a difference

BY MUKALA KABONGO

FOR THE ITEM

Mason Bourdeau of Lynn has found solace in giving back since becoming a mentor for the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Boston one year ago.

Bourdeau, a 2004 Lynn Classical graduate, said he based his decision on a need and a want to give something back.

“I haven’t done much as far as giving back to the community,” said Bourdeau, a manager for Famous Footwear in Hanover.

After looking for a way he found that being a Big Brother was for him.

Bourdeau and his little brother have gone to the movies, done arts and crafts and other activities that a kid would enjoy. He is always trying to figure out new and creative activities for him and his “little” to do.

For their last activity Bourdeau and his little went to the movies.

“We watched the ‘Ninja Turtles’ movie and it brought me back to when I was young,” said Bourdeau.

The more time he spends with his little brother, the boy becomes more open towards him as their relationship grows.

But there’s also a two-way benefit.

“A couple times a month you will see the difference in yourself,” he said.

“Finding out a little about myself and how being a mentor makes a difference,” said Bourdeau. “He’s a bright kid.”

You can also see difference that you can make in a young boy’s life by just being there for them. It doesn’t require any special training; you simply fill out an application and go through the process.

When you are under consideration to become a Big Brother, the interview process is very intense and can get personal. The interview ranges from where you went to school to whether you have ever been convicted of a felony.

You’ll be asked questions about your upbringing, your parents and other personal things that you might not normally tell anyone. The interview can go from one hour or two hours long.

“Give back to the community and make a difference.”

“A couple times a month you will see the difference in yourself.”

MASON Bourdeau

Lynn resident, Big Brother

HOW TO HELP

There are currently 22 boys in Lynn who are waiting to be matched with a Big Brother. The need for more male mentors is very high, especially in Lynn, according to the Big Brother Big Sister Association.

For more information on becoming a Big Brother, go to www.bbbsmb.org/get-involved/default.aspx or http://www.bbbsmb.org.
You're invited to make a difference in a young person's life!

Help The Newton Mentoring Alliance celebrate the Red Sox Mentoring Challenge and discover first hand what it's like to be a mentor while enjoying some ballpark snacks!

You'll learn:

why mentoring matters to the community
how we make solid matches that last
how meeting twice a month can have a lasting impact on a middle or high school student

Join us for some FREE rock climbing and see current matches in action!

FAQs

What are my transport/parking

Show more options getting to the event?

Central Rock Gym has ample free parking. There is a lot surrounding the building as well as two additional lots down the street. See their Parking Map for details:

What can/can't I bring to the event?

You can and should bring:

- a desire to learn about mentoring and the positive effects for both students and mentors
- a friend!
- your mentee (if you are a current mentor)
-clothes that are comfortable for rock climbing, Central Rock can provide appropriate footwear if necessary

Where can I contact the organizer with any questions?

If you have questions please give us a call at 617-559-2055 or email us at mentor@thenewtonpartnership.org

Do I have to bring my printed ticket to the event?

Nope, just bring yourself! We ask that you RSVP before the event for planning purposes so we can make sure there’s enough yummy snacks and fun goody bags for everyone! However you will need to complete the waiver for rock climbing found here: http://www.centralrockgym.com/waiver.php

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Northampton (MA) Daily Hampshire Gazette
09/24/2014
"Big Brothers Big Sisters gives mentoring award to Northwestern District Attorney David Sullivan"
Audience: 42,434
Source Website: www.gazettenet.com/home

Gazette Staff

Wednesday, September 24, 2014

Email Print Comments

AMHERST " Northwestern District Attorney David Sullivan is being recognized for his longstanding support of youth mentoring by a local human services agency.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Hampshire County, a program of the Center for Human Development, will give Sullivan its "Champion of Mentoring" award at the annual meeting of the advisory board Monday. The meeting will be at the Courtyard by Marriott in Hadley from 7 to 8:30 p.m.

Renee Moss, director of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, said in a statement that the evening will celebrate the past year through stories about its work.

"We are so excited to be recognizing David for his support of mentoring," Moss said. "In addition to attending and speaking at so many of our events over the years, he has been an incredibly strong supporter for mentoring as a preventative strategy while promoting positive youth development in the community."

The agency, which assists children throughout Hampshire County by connecting them with college students and adult mentors, received additional support through an annual golf tournament sponsored by Sullivan.

Audience provided by Nielsen/NetRatings

Highlights: big-sisters, mentoring, Big Sisters, youth mentoring, Mentoring, children, adult, mentors
Westborough woman helps girls become leaders

By Nance Ebhart
Contributing Writer

Westborough - Stephanie Graham appears to have mastered the idea of multitasking with charm and ease. She is a wife, mother of three young children, Realtor and still finds time to volunteer for Girls, Inc., one day each week where she is a mentor to girls from the Abby Kelley Foster Charter School in Worcester.

Graham grew up in Westborough and married her high school sweetheart. Their three small children, daughter Neely, 4, son Isaac, 1 1/2, and daughter Amelia, one month, all have adjusted to their mom's busy schedule and Graham is grateful for the nanny that helps her family run smoothly.

Having been in the biotech industry for years in pharmaceutical sales, she realized that while she enjoyed her flexible schedule and interacting with people on a daily basis, the industry was not fulfilling her any more. A friend who she had known all of her life, Ed Newton, encouraged her to get her real estate license and join Mathieu Newton (Mike Mathieu and Ed Newton) Sotheby's International Realty, where he is a broker.

"Ed has been asking me to do this for a while," she recalled. "I was always scared to take the leap because I'd be going from a salaried position to one now that was commission based. I'm glad I took the leap. I felt that this was something I'd be good at and after starting a little over one year ago, I am glad I did make that decision."

Graham became involved with Girls, Inc., when a close friend of hers, Colleen Dowd, who is on the board of the organization, mentioned that they were looking for volunteers to help mentor high school girls for a specific program called the "Leadership Academy."

"That was the first thing that I volunteered for with Girls, Inc.," Graham said. "They have a couple of different high schools and guidance counselors can nominate high school girls that they feel would benefit from their Leadership Academy. It's a 12-week program where I was assigned two girls to mentor. There were 15 girls from the Abby Kelley Foster Charter School in Worcester in the program."

In the Leadership Academy, there was a specific goal each week, ranging from taking care of finances, researching colleges, time management, money management and more.

For one of the programs, Graham participated in "Dress for Success," where the girls were taught to dress and behave appropriately for an interview, whether it was for a job interview or a college admission interview.

"We gave each girl a donated gift card so that the girls could go to Macy's," she noted. "The girls all got to pick out a professional outfit. For many of these juniors and seniors, this was a life-changing moment and I got to be a part of it. That's what I spent the most time volunteering for last year."

She also helped with a "college shower," at which local companies donated things that the students would need for their dorm room like bedding as well as school supplies like notebooks and even a Kindle. "We are there to celebrate these girls. We hold a nice dinner where these girls, at the end of the night, leave with everything that they would need for college. This is one of the only organizations that I know of that does something like this," Graham said.

Each of the mentor volunteers gets an opportunity to lead a group. This past year, Graham held one on leadership. The girls all talked about ways to do the right thing and be a leader whether that was at home or school.

"I wasn't a leader in middle school," Graham remembered. "Motherhood made me realize that I want my children to be leaders. I want my daughters to know that they can have any job that any boy can have. Volunteering at Girls, Inc. is a good way for me to lead by example for my children. Every time I'm there, I know I am making a difference. It's very gratifying. I also try to be present wherever I am. Whatever I
am doing, I give 100 percent."

Stephanie Graham
THINGS TO DO

Getting ready for school.

Whether it's playing a game or helping with homework, SMILES mentors like James have a profound impact on the children they work with.

Something to SMILE about

BY JAY PATEAKOS

Formed in 2003 to counter the area's chronically high dropout rate, the South Coast Mentoring Initiative for Learning, Education and Services (SMILES) continues to grow. The program's goal is to have an impact on all high-risk students in the region's school systems. SMILES continues to have a strong base in its original New Bedford and Fall River School systems, as well as school programs in Westport.

In 2010, People, Incorporated took over the small, grass-roots non-profit, helping to make it a more sustainable program with a continued focus on supporting children and families within the South Coast community. Traditional SMILES mentoring takes place at the junior high and high school level. Mentors are paired up one-on-one with mentees and they participate in activities designed to be fun and engaging for both parties. Literary-based mentoring, for grades 1-5, allows mentors to help a student work on their individual needs whether it is reading, math or any other subject they struggle with.

More help needed

Pat O'Neill, People Inc.'s Vice President of Communications and Administration, said efforts are currently underway to increase the number of mentors they have, thus creating opportunities for more children to benefit from a mentor/mentee relationship. At the end of the 2013-14 school year, there were 173 mentors at 21 schools in New Bedford, Fall River and Westport.

But with thousands of at-risk school children in the South Coast, so many more mentors are needed, and now.

"We are looking to get the word out to local employers about the benefits of mentoring for children in our local communities. Our hope is to have employers embrace the mission of SMILES, which is to help at-risk youth realize their personal and educational potential through a large scale one-to-one mentoring program, whereby allowing their employees to take one hour a week out of their schedule to mentor a deserving child," said O'Neill.

A number of companies in the South Coast already take part in SMILES, including BayCoast Bank, which has more than 25 employees mentoring every week.

"We would like to see each of our programs reach full capacity which would be upwards of 300 matches in the three communities we serve," said O'Neill. "We are looking to have 45 new mentors by the start of school and a total of 130 by the end of the school year."

O'Neill said SMILES is important for both mentors and mentees for various reasons depending on each perspective. For mentees, SMILES provides two different mentoring program models each delivering vital benefits depending on the student's age.

At the elementary school level, O'Neill said the literacy-based model
is designed to help students become independent learners with strategies for discovering solutions on their own.

Mentors are encouraged to support their mentee in discovering solutions, solving problems, and finding meaning in their daily literacy work rather than directly giving the solution.

"By providing children with techniques and strategies instead of direction solutions, we are giving them paths of action so that giving up is not an option," she said.

"These techniques and strategies are the first steps in building resiliency not only in the academic setting, but in their day to day lives."

In the middle schools, the SMILES' traditional program model takes on a bit of a different approach. O'Neill said they take what the students have learned in the literacy programs to the next level.

"Mentees have begun to learn and develop the skills and qualities necessary to gain individual resiliency. The traditional program model is aligned with the 40 Developmental Assets for adolescents," said O'Neill, noting that the 40 Developmental Assets are a series of qualities that help influence choices young people make and help them become caring, responsible, successful adults.

"We want students to leave our program ready and able to tap into their strengths, cope and recover from adversity and be prepared for future challenges," said O'Neill.

Proven track record

Outside of these program models, O'Neill said their statistics show that mentoring in general has been shown to have positive effects in other aspects of at-risk youth's lives. According to a public/private ventures study conducted on behalf of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program, students who meet regularly with their mentors are 52 percent less likely than their peers to skip a day of school and 37 percent less likely to skip a class. Youth who meet regularly with their mentors are 46 percent less likely than their peers to start using illegal drugs and 27 percent less likely to start drinking. Mentors help young people set career goals and start taking steps to realize them.

Other benefits of mentoring include: feeling great knowing that you are helping a young person to grow in a positive direction and getting the opportunity to meet other volunteers who share your desire to create positive change in our community.

But in the end, statistics aside for the moment, what do the students really get out of this one-on-one mentoring?"

"Our program models are designed to equip at-risk youth with tools that they need to succeed in life. Whether they are enhancing their literacy skills or participating in activities that will better prepare them for adulthood, all of our mentees share the same need to have a positive adult mentor in their lives," said O'Neill.

"By providing mentees with mentors, they are receiving the biggest benefit that SMILES has to offer: a role model. That is the common thread in both the literacy-based and traditional mentoring program models. It is of paramount importance that a positive, trusting, long-term relationship is established between a mentor and mentee. Without it, the curricula that have been developed for our programs would not be as effective in delivering positive results to mentees."

Want to hear a few success stories? O'Neill said they have seen many improvements in the day-to-day lives of the mentees they serve. Mentors work to change the scope of their mentees' lives in many ways, including adding an heir of positivity and happiness that can only be described on an individual level.

"It is of paramount importance that SMILES recruits mentors who can build successful relationships with at-risk youth and who understand the importance of mentoring," said O'Neill.
Lee Snitzer, one of our Fall River mentees, has been a mentor with SMILES for over five years and is someone who truly exemplifies an investment in the value of mentoring," said O'Neil.

Snitzer is currently paired with a 9th and 10th grader at Durfee High School, a 6th grader at Kuss Middle School and a 5th grader at Greene Elementary School.

A father himself, Snitzer knows the importance of a positive adult role model in a child's life and strives to be that person during every one of his mentoring sessions with his four mentees.

Snitzer's newest mentee, Michael, a 9th grader at Durfee High School, was a particular challenge for previous mentors, said O'Neil. Michael transitioned into adulthood successfully," O'Neil noted.

Snitzer, 46, told the South Coast Insider that once his own children grew up and went to college, he needed to fill a huge void in his life, a void that he soon filled with SMILES.

"I used to be so involved in my own kids' lives that I needed to do something," said Snitzer. "I loved kids so this program was perfect for me."

But one mentee wasn't enough. Snitzer now has four mentees ranging in ages from 9 to 15. He participates in both the literacy and traditional mentoring programs.

"High school is the toughest to find things to do to hold their interest but we find a way," said Snitzer, a father of three.

"People need to remember that a SMILES mentor is not a teacher or a parent. They are a friend. Unless it's

"These kids have a lot to say; they just don't know who to say it to. It takes a while for them to open up, but once they do, it's amazing."

was very shy and reserved and would not even speak to some of his previous mentors.

"Knowing the importance of having a positive role model, Lee asked if he could mentor Michael. His experience proved effective as Michael began opening up," said O'Neil.

"Over the last few months Michael's attitude has changed dramatically. Lee reported that 'When Michael started opening up I knew he trusted me. He will talk to me about anything. He is open and we have a good relationship.'"

Now when they meet, O'Neil said Michael and Lee like to discuss possible higher education and career options.

"Having mentors like Lee who truly believe and invest in mentoring are what make it possible for SMILES to continue to help at-risk youth emotionally and academically and something that can hurt themselves or someone else. I want to talk about everything with them. And over the years, I've heard just about anything."

Ironically, Snitzer said he can get his SMILES mentees to open up and talk to him far more than he can his own kids.

"These kids have a lot to say; they just don't know who to say it to. It takes a while for them to open up, but once they do, it's amazing," said Snitzer. "They need an adult to talk to and many of them don't have that. I enjoy it immensely."

**Mentees becoming mentors**

O'Neil noted that for the 2013-2014 school year, 100 percent of SMILES high school seniors graduated. Among them were brother and sister Freddy and Deysi.

"Freddy and Deysi graduated this past June from B.M.C. Durfee High School in Fall River and have been matched with their mentors Tom and Suzette for seven and five years respectively," said O'Neil.

"Both Tom and Suzette have greatly impacted Freddy and Deysi's lives and have truly exemplified an investment in the value of mentoring over the last half-decade."

Upon the conclusion of each matches' formal, school-based tenure, O'Neil said SMILES staff had the opportunity to meet with Freddy, Deysi, Tom and Suzette to discuss the effects of their mentoring relationships and the graduates' plans for the future.

Both Freddy and Deysi hold part-time jobs and are planning to attend Bristol Community College in September. Freddy put the value of his mentoring relationship with Tom into perspective by saying, "I would not be where I am today without Tom. He has helped me so much over the years." He went on to say how he would also like to be a positive role model for a child as Tom was to him. "As soon as I figure out my school schedule I would like to mentor a kid because I know how great it makes you feel."

A classic case of paying it forward and I'm sure there are many, many more like it. But more mentors are needed. If you have an hour each week to spend changing the lives of a South Coast student (only September to June), it's time to make your mark.

Don't wait to be asked. These kids can't wait! Contact SMILES Program Director Aaron Hubeley at ahubley@peopleinc-fr.org or 508-679-5233.
MAZIE PROGRAM

Residents named mentors

Waltham residents Jeff Gordon, Mark D. Koepper and John Schabacker 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, according to the organization. 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.

Gordon, Koepper and Schabacker were each matched with a sophomore from Waltham 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, according to the organization. In turn, mentors are often inspired by their mentees and find volunteering for the Mazie Mentoring Program to be a rewarding experience.

"Our volunteer mentors are the vital ingredients that make our program run successfully," said founding and Executive Director Lowell Mazie. "Not only do they help students to achieve success, but, they often experience positive changes within themselves. Mentors report having improved listening skills and becoming more open to new ideas as a result of their participation. Overall, mentors find their experience to be a meaningful way to give back to the community."

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, according to the organization.

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 at maziefdn@comcast.net.
High school students mentored at Brandeis

By Leah Burrows
Brandeis University

As a teacher at Waltham High School, Vivekanand Vimal, Ph.D. Class of 2016 at Brandeis University, wanted more for his students. He did what he could to foster inquiry and creativity in his physics and environmental science classes but it wasn't easy.

"It's hard to cram a real lab into 50 minutes with a classroom full of kids and state tests looming on the horizon," Vimal recalls. "I wanted to create an environment that escapes the dungeon of tests and grades and breaks the fetters of stale textbooks. I wanted to take these young, passionate people and give them an opportunity to explore and gain skills in a real lab."

After six years of teaching, Vimal decided to leave the classroom to pursue a career in research at Brandeis University but he never lost his passion for science education. At Brandeis, Vimal saw an opportunity to connect world-renowned scientists with local students and, in 2012, he reached out to Waltham High School to develop a summer internship for students interested in science and research.

Since its launch, the program has brought more than 20 Waltham High School students to campus during the summer to work on real research projects. The students are assigned to labs based on their interests and are paired with graduate student mentors who guide them and teach them skills such as how to stain tissue samples for protein markers and how to...
grow cell colonies.

"The experiments that the students run are the same experiments that graduate students run," says Vinay Eapen, Ph.D. Class of 2015 at Brandeis, a mentor in professor Jim Haber's lab.

Eapen mentors Jackie Jordan, a rising senior at Waltham High School. Jordan is running experiments to understand the proteins involved in repairing the DNA damage that can lead to cancer and other diseases.

"The lab experience here is different from what you learn in the classroom because in the classroom, the labs have expected results," says Jordan. "Here, you are doing research that's never been done before. No one knows what the answers are going to be."

The mentors – all volunteers – get as much out of the program as the students.

"It's a really rewarding experience," says Eapen. "When you see your student working independently and solving problems on their own, you know you've made your mark."

"The students get a true idea of what science is," says Nate Miska, Ph.D. Class of 2016 at Brandeis, a mentor in professor Gina Turrigiano's lab. "I didn't get that kind of experience until well into my science education."

Lab skills are not the only things these high school students take away.

"This summer has taught me a lot about how to set a schedule, balance my time and organize my findings," says Faizia Nurain Sharif, a junior at Waltham High School, who spent the summer in professor Angela Gutchees' aging, culture and cognition lab. "I feel more prepared to go to college."

Fostering life skills and creating a sense of community are goals of the program, Vimal says.

"I want to create a feeling of family among the students and mentors but also between Brandeis and Waltham High School," Vimal says. "I want these young students to know that their journey towards a career in science isn't in darkness. There are these world-renowned scientists right up the street who can light the way."

This year’s mentors include Achini Opathalage, Avijit Bakshi, Elizaveta Khlestova, Jonathan Jackson, Nate Miska, Peter Millar, Sumantra Sarkar, Vinay Eapen and Vivekanand Pandey Vimal. For more information about the program or to volunteer as a mentor for next year, contact Vivekanand Vimal at vvimaldhye@gmail.com.
How their garden grows!

Children’s garden thrives, as do its young gardeners

By Rich Eldred
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BREWSTER — Cape Cod’s farmers markets should be on guard — they may have serious competition coming down the pike.

The Brewster Children’s Garden at the town’s community gardens on Lower Road, held an open house Tuesday afternoon and the grade school-age gardeners showed off produce that would pop the eyes of shoppers at any local supermarket. Dark purple tomatoes that promised exotic mysterious flavors, radishes bigger than grapefruits, beautiful deep red beets, cheerful nasturtiums snaking around cucumber plants, and eggplants that were long and lean, burst from rich garden beds.

“My biggest success is artichoke. This will turn out to have a huge purple flower,” Sabrina Robsham observed.

The artichokes stood tall over lush sea-green leaves. She plans to harvest two and let the third bloom. Her small garden was filled with bounty.

“Tomatoes, turnips, beans, cucumbers, peppers, eggplants,” Sabrina enumerated “I haven’t tried (the eggplant) out. It’s all in fun. This is the first time I’ve gardened. My mentor Mike helped me with a lot of it. He would take fish manure and put it in the water.”

Her sister Sophie is also a gardener.

“Food and flowers, I like harvesting stuff, except cabbage because it hurts my back so much,” Sophie noted. “I like eggplants because it’s cool to see them grow.”

Cabbages are big and heavy, especially as grown by these gifted green thumbs.

The head mentor is Virginia Marhevka and she matches up the 12 youngsters with a mentor from the Barnstable County Master Gardener’s program.

“Each youngster has their own plot we also have community gardens of flowers, pumpkins, strawberries and potatoes,” Marhevka explained. “This is our eighth year. We try to teach them the fundamentals of vegetable gardening, how vegetables and flowers grow to give them an appreciation of where food comes from and an appreciation of self.”

Some of the harvest never reaches home. Carrots are washed under the faucets an eaten immediately as are snap peas and cherry tomatoes. The youngsters get to make scarecrows — and indeed the crows were scared — none were to be seen.

They learn about worms, bees and birds.

“She gets an education from seed to the table,” mom Amy Cuneo declared enthusiastically. “My daughter (Alexei Collella) is 10 and she just loves it, she absolutely loves it. This year she is doing more tasting and cooking. She’s Googling zucchini recipes. All of this was seed two months ago. She’s learned so much. They’ve had great lectures about composting and worms, one on one with master gardeners, it’s just wonderful.”

The master gardeners love it, too.

“It’s just fun to get them...
enthusiastic about gardening and share knowledge about growing vegetables,” noted mentor Louise Wasley. “I’ve learned a lot from them, too. I never taught this age group before and they’re fun. They’ve been coming every week. Initially it was all planting and weeding now they see what happens.”

“They’re learning gardening patience and in a fast food world that’s not automatic. They are getting a more realistic view of how the world operates,” reflected master gardener Cal Mutti, who specializes in giant pumpkins.

Bailey Harris one of the young gardeners proudly held up a plump turnip, except it wasn’t a turnip but a massive radish.

“It’s a watermelon radish,” she explained. “It’s white on the outside and red on the inside. “You can slice them in salad but my dad eats them whole.”

“Bailey’s a rather earthy person and I can’t teach her what she gets here,” her mom Kimberly added. “It’s great for her how it’s one-on-one with someone who’s so knowledgeable. We have an ity-bitty garden at home but her mentor here Meryl (Gartside) is fantastic. They’re so well matched and they didn’t know each other before.”

The program is sponsored by the master gardeners, utilizing Brewster Conservation Trust land at the community garden. During the summer the kids and mentors meet every Tuesday afternoon at the garden.

“My daughter is 10 and she just loves it, she absolutely loves it. This year she is doing more tasting and cooking. She’s Googling zucchini recipes...She’s learned so much. They’ve had great lectures about composting and worms, one on one with master gardeners, it’s just wonderful.”

-Amy Cuneo, mother of Alexei Collella, gardener
These aren’t grapes; they’re tasty Indigo Rose tomatoes that are ripe when they’re nearly black.
Sophie Robshaw shows off one of her ripening tomatoes at the Children’s Garden at Brewster Community Garden.
Staff photos by Rich Eldred
WEYMOUTH

Tutoring for homeless kids

School on Wheels to help students living in motel; Randolph program also in the offing

By Christian Schiavone
THE PATRIOT LEDGER

WEYMOUTH — A cramped motel room with multiple family members isn’t the ideal place to learn to spell, tackle algebra homework or study for that big history test.

But the Super 8 motel on Route 53 is where 62 children between the ages of 5 and 18 have been coming home to after school as part of a state program that houses thousands of homeless families in hotels and motels because traditional shelter beds aren’t available.

Now, a Brockton-based nonprofit wants to help make getting through school a little easier for children facing the instability of not having a permanent home.

School on Wheels of Massachusetts, started by Easton resident Cheryl Oppen in 2004, will begin tutoring kids at the motel two days a week starting this fall. It is also rolling out a tutoring and mentoring program for homeless kids in the Randolph schools that will be incorporated into the school day.

The Randolph program is being underwritten by Randolph Savings Bank and will be housed at the Randolph Community Middle School.

Robin Gilbert, operations director for School on Wheels, said the organization had been aware of the families at the Super 8 through its work with Friends of the Homeless, which operates shelters in Weymouth and Norwell.

“They’ve been down there for a lot of years with four kids in one room.”

School on Wheels also offers tutoring in Brockton, New Bedford, Norwell and Stoughton. It’s planning to expand to two new sites in Brockton this fall, as well. Its programs offer homework help and other academic support for children in kindergarten through high school.

The organization will also provide backpacks full of new books, crayons, rulers and other school supplies to each homeless student at the Super 8 and about 75 homeless students in Randolph.

“They’re fully stocked, everything’s new and they are thrilled to get them,” Gilbert said. “We want them to have everything their classmates have.”

Extra help provided by programs like the ones offered by School on Wheels can make a world of difference for homeless kids trying to keep up in school, said Robyn Frost, executive director of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless.

“To have volunteers come in and give attention to a child is huge in an academic learning situation,” she said.

To keep up with the new programs, School on Wheels is recruiting volunteer tutors and mentors. More information is available at www.sowma.org.

Christian Schiavone may be reached at cschiavone@ledger.com. Follow him on Twitter @CSchiavo_Ledger.
GE employee Dave McKenna serves as a Big Brother

By Lori Breighner

Dave McKenna, 29, of Revere, first heard about Big Brothers Big Sisters from a friend who fondly remembered his days as a little brother over 20 years later. “He told me a lot of stories about what he did with his Big Brother and how much he impacted him,” Dave says. “It sparked my imagination and seemed like a good way for me to give back to the community.” When he moved back to the Boston area to work as an engineer at GE several years ago after serving as an educator with Teach for America in Texas, he made it a priority to sign up to be a mentor with BBBSMB.

Dave and his little brother, Milton, 12, of Revere, have been matched for over two years and enjoy a variety activities together. Milton, who just finished 6th grade, loves sports, so the two love to play ball and visit the batting cages and even went to Skyzone, an indoor trampoline park together. “It’s a fun way to feel like a kid again.” Dave says. They also take advantage of free tickets from generous BBBSMB donors and have gone to sporting events, the MFA, the Museum of Science, and the aquarium together for free.

Milton’s mother and stepmother wanted Milton to have a Big Brother because he is an only child and they both work long hours. They thought that it would be a good way for him to stay active and do fun things in the community with a positive role model. Both Dave and Milton have benefited from the friendship. It provides Milton with a safe space to talk through life issues with a trusted adult, and it has been the perfect way for Dave to connect with the community. “I feel so much more a part of Revere through mentoring than I would have if I had never become a Big Brother,” Dave says.

Although Dave recently accepted a supervisory position with Teach for America and will relocate to North Carolina later this summer, he and Milton look forward to maintaining their strong friendship. Milton and his family will drive down to NC with Dave to ease the transition. They also plan to skype at least once a month. Although they will be distanced by several states, they are both grateful for the memories they formed as “brothers” and are confident that they will continue to be a part of each others’ lives.

Unbelievably, there are still more than 800 boys in the Massachusetts Bay area waiting for a Big Brother. To find out how you can make a difference in a child’s life, please contact Lori Breighner at Lbreighner@bbbsmb.org or visit www.bbbsmb.org.
Little Brother treated to day with police

As the youngest of two older brothers, Javier Valdivieso, now 26, a police officer with the Babson College Police Department, always knew he wanted to become a Big Brother.

“I wanted to wait for the right time so I could commit 100 percent,” Valdivieso said. “It came naturally for me to want to give back to a child who was in need of a mentor.”

After solidifying his position at the Babson College Police Depart-

ment, Valdivieso contacted Big Brothers Big Sisters of Massachusetts Bay and was matched with his Little Brother Job, 8, from Waltham.

“When I first met Job he was kind of shy. I had to think outside of the box!” Valdivieso said. “He had mentioned he liked fire trucks, so the second time we hung out, I took him to the police and fire departments. He immediately lit up. He had a blast. We went down and gave him a tour where he got to try on the equipment.”

As they spent more time together, their relationship transformed. Now, the two of them are incredibly close and love just hanging out, going to the New England Aquarium, or even helping Santa pick out a new sled for Christmas.

“He is always down to try new things, he’s always ready to go. Sometimes I’m the one who’s moving too slow!” Valdivieso said about their time together. “I want
him to look back and think I'm successful today in part because of the experiences I had with my 'Big.'

There is no doubt that when Job reminisces back to his time spent with Javier, he will have many memories to choose from, including memories from a recent weekend where Job and his sister Nicola, a Little Sister through the Big Sister Association of Greater Boston, were presented as honorary Junior Police Officers at the Babson College Police Department. After hearing about Nicola's interest in the police department, Valdivieso, the Babson College Police Department and Sgt. Frederick Winslow decided to give the two of them a special Big Brothers Big Sisters Day, to educate them on the experiences of being a police officer.

"When people ask those who become police officers why they do that they do, the answers is almost always 'To help people,' Winslow said. "If that is true, what better way to help someone then to educate them at an early age about what we do, who we are and allow us to interact with two young people and help form their impressions of police officers as people who help rather than being someone to fear."

After being sworn in, Job and Nicola were given a tour of the ins and outs of the department. Valdivieso, Winslow and Officer Kevin Carrigan showed them how to take fingerprints and how to write a parking ticket, and taught them about police officer safety. Dispatcher Meghan Rosenberg showed Job and Nicola how dispatch worked and gave them walkie-talkies to call in to her. Also with the group was Ify Mora, Nicola's Big Sister from the Big Sister Association of Greater Boston. Mora and Nicola have been matched for almost a year, and they clicked ever since the beginning. Mora came from a large family, so becoming a Big Sister was natural for her.

"I was in a great place in my life where I wanted to connect with someone. I really wanted to give back," she said.

After the tour of the department, Valdivieso and Winslow took the group outside to see the police cars. Job and Nicola got a chance to learn more about the cars and go for a ride. They even got a chance to give a parking ticket. They were a huge help in a mock investigation where they found evidence with their flashlights and placed it in evidence bags.

By the end of the day, Job and Nicola both wanted to be police officers. Job said his favorite part of the day was "mostly everything. Nicola wants to be a police officer because "you can help people and you can save peoples' lives."

Although "Littles" graduate from the Big Brother Program by the age of 18, many stay close to their "Bigs" afterwards. Valdivieso plans to keep his special relationship with Job.

"My role isn't to be his parent or his disciplinary; my job is to provide him with guidance," Valdivieso said. "Any help with school, a girlfriend or anything, I want to give him advice as a friend. But eventually, after I'm his mentor, I want us both to be equals."

For information on volunteering, visit www.bbbmmb.org.

Alexandra Hodgman
Economic Driver

Mentors guide students in business, leadership, civics

By Kärin Radock
SPECIAL TO THE TELEGRAM & GAZETTE

WORCESTER — A summer program is giving 30 area high school students the opportunity to work with and be mentored by local business leaders.

The Worcester Youth Leadership Institute is part of the YouthWorks program, a state-funded summer and year-round job program for Massachusetts low-income youths, which subsidizes private, public and nonprofit jobs for at-risk youths between the ages of 14 and 21, according to worcesterresources.org.

"Worcester has received funding to employ 360 youth for the (YouthWorks) program," said Jeff Turgeon, executive director of the Central Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board. "They will work 20 hours a week, for seven weeks, at different nonprofit and for-profit sites, doing work such as park cleanups, office work, online editing, science and technology work, like visiting the Tufts (veterinary) clinic at Worcester Tech."

The institute was created through a partnership with the Workforce Investment Board, United Way of Central Massachusetts, United Families for Change, Worcester Education Collaborative, the City of Worcester's Youth Opportunities Office and the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Of those 360 youths enrolled in YouthWorks, 30 senior and junior high students were selected from employer nominations to participate in the institute as part of their employment program. The seven-week institute, which began July 7, includes a variety of events such as question-and-answer sessions with business leaders and visits and tours.

Students will also take part in a leadership program called Bounce! offered through the Workforce Central Career Center.

"The Bounce training program was brought to us from Australia and was incorporated in a previous youth program here," Mr. Turgeon said. Local staff have become certified trainers.

"It will allow students to learn high-level communication skills and strategies, goal setting and attainment strategies and how to develop a positive vision for themselves," he said.

This aspect of the institute will help make the program "real for kids" and also make it fun, said Timothy P. Murray, president and chief executive officer of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce.

In addition, a skills development component will teach students about Worcester history, culture, life and health sciences, nonprofit organizations, entrepreneurship, media and communications and city government.

Mr. Murray said the program is "about leadership succession in the business community, government and the nonprofit and education world. It's an opportunity for various sectors and leaders to reach out and engage with youth."

The idea for the program came from conversations he had "about the needs of community youth and job opportunities" with Worcester Mayor Joseph Petty and with George Smith and Ron Scott from United Families for Change, leaders in minority communities.

Mr. Murray said after the summer program is over, they are thinking about getting the students together periodically during the school year.

"We will see these students as leaders in years to come," he said. "I have high expectations for the students and their future leadership. They will help shape the city."

Kärin Radock can be reached at kradock.telegram@gmail.com. Follow her on Twitter at @KebRadock.
Worcester Youth Leadership Institute organizers, from left, are Jeff Turgeon of the Central Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board, Ron Scott of United Families for Change, Raquel Castro-Corazzini, Youth Opportunities coordinator for the city, and Tim Murray, of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce.
LA CHIC FASHION SHOW AND FUNDRAISER

La Chic Mentoring Plus held a fashion show and dinner fundraiser at the Lynn Museum.

La Chic, under the director of Keisha Conigliaro, is a year-round after school mentoring program for girls ages 11 and 18.

Dr. Joseph Dowling, Lynn chiropractor, and his wife, Kerryn Dowling, assisted the La Chic Mentoring Plus program with their attendance and support at the fundraiser.

Keisha Conigliaro (left), executive director of La Chic Mentoring Plus, is pictured with some of the young ladies who walked the runway and displayed the fashionable attire.
Executive director Keisha Conigliaro (left) is pictured with some of the attendees and participants in the La Chic Mentoring Plus after school program and fashion show.

This group of guests had a great time at the La Chic Mentoring plus fundraiser at the Lynn Museum.
DASSAULT SYSTEMES

Business hosts job shadowing event for mentees

On June 9, Dassault Systèmes, which specializes in 3D design software, hosted a job shadowing event for local teens at the company's Waltham-based office.

Four students from Waltham High School were invited to work alongside Dassault employees in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) careers. In addition to their job shadowing, students had the opportunity to experience Dassault Systemes' groundbreaking 3D Virtual Reality Center, where they drove virtual cars, navigated a virtual sail boat and walked through a beating virtual human heart, all in realistic 3D.

Participating students were selected by 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. Each student, a mentee of the Mazie Mentoring Program, is working to pursue a career in a STEM-related field.

For the past two years, Dassault Systèmes has supported JAMMF and the Mazie Mentoring Program by recruiting mentors from among the company's Waltham-based employees, conducting a STEM career information session, and hosting job shadow opportunities.

Over the past 16 years, the Mazie Mentoring Program has helped more than 550 young people go on to lead more fulfilled and successful lives while inspiring the adult volunteer mentors who work with them, according to the organization. Through the unique, goal-orientated and reward-oriented scholarship award program, mentors work with high school students for five semesters to improve their academic standing, build confidence, apply to college and experience success. Along the way, students work to set and achieve goals while earning rewards, culminating in a college scholarship.

Each year, the Mazie Mentoring Program accepts 60 Framingham and Waltham High School students. More than 90 percent of those in the program graduate from high school and more than 70 percent go on to college or other post-secondary training programs.

For more information about the Mazie Mentoring Program, to become a mentor, or to support the John Andrew Mazie Memorial Foundation, visit www.mazie.org.
From left to right are Chin-Loo Lama, senior manager, user experience design, Dassault Systèmes; Mazie mentees Derek Ramirez, Luis Barrera, Wilton Medina and Jonathan Solares; Janet Nicholas, director, corporate citizenship and marketing strategy, Dassault Systèmes; John Sweeney, director, systems and user interface applications, Dassault Systèmes; and Eric Turnquist, director, systems and storage operations, Dassault Systèmes. COURTESY PHOTO / SHAWNA HANSON
HOLYOKE

Ice cream social celebrates reading program

Elementary school students from the Morgan School were on the Holyoke Community College campus to enjoy an ice cream social with their reading mentors and receive free books.

The ice cream social and book presentation was hosted by the Holyoke Community College Foundation, the nonprofit fundraising arm of the college.

A dozen members of the college staff serve as reading mentors for students at Morgan School, with each mentor matched with one student in kindergarten, first-, second- and third-grades. College staff also visit Morgan School classrooms regularly during the school year to read books as part of a guest reader program.

College president William Messner welcomed students, their families and reading mentors. After eating ice cream, the students received balloons, age-appropriate books and, yes, even admissions packets to HCC.

“You can never start too soon,” said Erica Broman, vice president of institutional development and executive director of the foundation.
The Bartley Center at Holyoke Community College was the setting for an ice cream social with students from Morgan Elementary School and their reading mentors. Above, Colleen Cameron dishes out the whipped cream. At left, Marielys Diaz Serrano watches as Solmarie Gomez adds toppings to her ice cream (Johh Suchocki / THE REPUBLICAN).

At left, reading mentor Jennifer Macarini reads with first-grade student Kris Mary Mattei. At right, reading mentor Carol Ann Smalley and Antonio Garcia Pagan work on reading skills. (Johh Suchocki / THE REPUBLICAN)
Bill Messner, president of Holyoke Community College, greets students and encouraged them to keep learning.
Making a Difference...... One Child at a Time

Action Centered Tutoring Services (ACTS) recently held its 3rd Annual Tutor Appreciation Dinner at the Evangelical Covenant Church in Springfield with 70+ guests attending. Those in attendance included ACTS tutors, staff and Board members, ACTS Scholarship recipients, and YMCA Executive staff. Kirk Smith, President and CEO, of the YMCA of Greater Springfield was the featured speaker of the evening. The YMCA has collaborated with ACTS for the past year, providing all the after school snacks for the children. Smith vaulted the accomplishments of the tutors and referred to them as “hope restoration specialists.” Smith recounted his earlier years as a struggling student and said were it not for a few teachers and other mentors who took special interest in him, he would not be where he is today.

The Russ and Dot Weinhold Scholarship Fund awards were presented to the following recipients: Kennisha Young; Damian Denesha; and Samantha DeLong. Kennisha and Damian were both former students in the ACTS program and will be pursuing degrees at Holyoke Community College and UMass Dartmouth respectively. Samantha has been a volunteer tutor in the ACTS programs throughout her junior and senior years in high school. She will be attending the University of New Haven in the fall.

ACTS was established in 1986 and for over 25 years has been providing free faith based one-on-one tutoring to Springfield students in grades 1-5. There are 8 separate ACTS sites throughout Springfield where volunteer tutors meet with their students once a week after school. During their time together, tutors assist the students with their homework, provide positive reinforcement and equally importantly, take an interest in their student’s day and activities. Tutors do not have to possess a teaching degree, as training is provided through ACTS. If you are interested in becoming a tutor and role model for a young student in Springfield, please visit the ACTS website at www.acts86.org. The evening was underwritten by a generous grant from the Beveridge Foundation. In addition, Chef Brian Williams donated his time to prepare the banquet for the event.

Scholarship recipients with ACTS Board.
Left to right,
1st row: Samantha DeLong, Damian Denesha,
Kennisha Young
2nd row: Ernie Toussaint, Pamela Young, Barbara Fontaine, Willette Johnson
3rd row: Linda Howell, Jennifer Cushman, David Mazur, Joe Welch, Burt Hansen, Steve Lewis.
ACTS tutors left to right: Maria Maloney, Estelle Early, Francine Pina-Council, Valerie Garcia and Kary Sanchez.

Left to Right: Kirk Smith, President and CEO of the YMCA of Greater Springfield with Burt Hansen, Executive Director of ACTS.
Organization recently relocated to Burlington

The Boston Young Marines looking for volunteers

BURLINGTON - The Young Marines are looking for a few good men and women to serve as adult volunteers in the recently relocated unit.

The Boston Young Marines recently moved from its previous location at the U.S. Coast Guard base in Boston to Burlington High School where it will hold its weekly drill sessions.

The move to the new location and community will allow the unit to grow and will necessitate increased volunteer staffing.

According to Patrick Gilman, unit commander of the Boston Young Marines, registered adults are needed to assist in the training and development of the program’s 8-18-year-olds.

“Adult volunteers are our program’s greatest assets,” states Gilman. “These folks serve as instructors, mentors and role models for our Young Marines as part of our overall organizational goal of strengthening the lives of America’s youth.”

Some of the subjects adult volunteers assist with include basic first aid, public speaking and drug demand reduction training.

“Marine Corps or other previous military service is not a requirement to become an adult volunteer,” states Bruce Katz, unit executive officer and a retired Marine. “The program is based on Marine Corps principles of leadership and is designed to teach good citizenship and promote a healthy, drug-free lifestyle among the members of our program and local community.”

Adults interested in becoming a volunteer for the Burlington-based unit should contact Patrick Gilman by email at UC@bostonyoungmarines.com.

Additional information on the Young Marines program can be found on the national website, www.youngmarines.com.
The Falmouth Volunteers In Public Schools (VIPS) program recognized the contributions of its volunteers and celebrated the efforts of volunteers, students, and supporters at its annual volunteer recognition dinner on June 17 at the Coonamessett Inn.

VIPS began in 1982 as a way to connect the community to the public schools. What started with eight volunteers at Falmouth High School, today includes nearly 1,000 volunteers who spend time at each of Falmouth's seven schools.

In the 31 years the program has been in existence, volunteers have logged 986,626 hours, making it one of the most active public school volunteering programs in the state.

During the recognition event, VIPS director Tracey Crago highlighted some of the year's achievements, including the school-based mentoring programs which match trained volunteer mentors with a student in need of a friend and role model. Currently, 80 students meet with a mentor once each week throughout the school year.

VIPS mentoring programs have achieved the Partner level of membership in the MassMentoring Program's Quality-based membership program, reserved for programs that meet the highest standards for mentor training, support, and evaluation.

Another accomplishment this year is the expansion of the Girls Circle program. VIPS partners with Suzie Hauptmann at Falmouth Human Services, along with school counselors, and trained volunteer facilitators to offer Circles for girls in grades 4 to 12.

The Cross-Age Science Teaching Program (CAST) that pairs 8th grade "science buddies" with 3rd graders to hands-on teach electrical energy lessons, and the expansion of the Junior Achievement program at the elementary school level were also highlighted, as were the FHS Peer Mentoring Program that matches high school juniors and seniors with students in grades 5 to 8 in need of a role model and the FHS College Mentoring Program, headed by Jack Zorski, which pairs economically disadvantaged students with a mentor working in the field in which the student is interested.

Ms. Crago also highlighted the importance of grant support in sustaining and growing the VIPS programs. Funding from the Cape and Islands United Way, the Falmouth Fund of the Cape Cod Foundation, Cape Cod Five Charitable Foundation, Falmouth Substance Abuse Commission, Falmouth Prevention Partnership, Falmouth Education Foundation, Eastern Bank Charitable Foundation, the Bilezikian Family Foundation, and the Woods Hole Foundation have made it possible for VIPS to expand and enhance existing programs, while developing new programming areas.

At Tuesday's Volunteer Recognition Dinner, special recognition honors were bestowed upon individuals from each school whose efforts are considered outstanding by fellow volunteers, staff members, and students. This year's winners include Monica Bleiler from Falmouth High School, who created the "Well Grounded" project, a service learning initiative for teenagers designed to meld academics, community service, and hands-on hard work while cultivating student skills in civics, presentation and outreach abilities, and business partnerships; Paul Laurino from Lawrence
School, a retired educator for his involvement with the school's Literacy Committee and as an advisor and supporter of Lawrence staff members; Kathy Martino from Morse Pond, whose involvement in countless projects at multiple schools over many years is an example of what volunteerism is about; Kerry Munroe from East Falmouth Elementary School, whose contributions to numerous school events and playground fundraising efforts pushed the project over the finish line; Lynn Briggs and Lyn Cenzalli from Mullen-Hall Elementary School, who organize projects, events, and initiatives and wearing many hats; David Bird from North Falmouth Elementary, whose hands-on work has resulted in student artwork ranging from weaving and watercolor projects to leaf prints, tooth fairy pillows, and Valentine's Day mailboxes; and Sheila Topping from Teaticket Elementary School, whose works year round preparing for the annual holiday fair.

This year's recipients received engraved plates designed for VIPS by Woods Hole potter Tessa Lineaweaver.

The VIPS Board of Advisors also recognized Cheryl Atherton, whose efforts serve many schools and the greater community. Ms. Crago said Ms. Atherton epitomizes the spirit of volunteerism in the truest sense. "Whether working one on one with a student as a mentor, or a group of girls in the Girls Circle program, or helping out with fundraising, school, or community events, this volunteer has an endless reserve of time, energy, enthusiasm, and commitment that she dedicates to making kids' lives better."

In addition to the many adult volunteers, VIPS encourages and supports student volunteers. This year, the VIPS Board of Advisors funded scholarships to two Class of 2014 Falmouth High School graduates who exemplified a dedication to volunteerism and community service. This year's recipients were Molly Bagg and Lily Josephs. Molly, daughter of Christine Junqueira of Waquoit, will attend the University of Tampa. Lily, daughter of David and Jodi Josephs of East Falmouth, will attend the University of New Hampshire. This year's scholarships were made possible by the VIPS Board of Advisors and the Eastern Bank Charitable Foundation.

This year's VIPS recognition event was sponsored by Cape Cod Five Cents Savings Bank, Lawrence Lynch Corporation, Encore of Falmouth, and the VIPS Board of Advisors.

To learn more about volunteer opportunities available for the 2014-15 school year, contact the VIPS office at 508-548-1621 or vips@falmouth.k12.ma.us.

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Audience provided by Nielsen/NetRatings

Highlights: mentoring, mentors, mentor, Mass Mentoring, Girls, girls, Mentoring, kids, adult
CANCER CAN’T STOP HIM

Teen undaunted in face of disease

Peter Gelzinis

After spending too much of his 15-year-old life navigating a path around the cancer of guns and gangs that infect his Dorchester neighborhood, Damone Clark was recently given a brutal choice by strangers in white coats.

“It was Valentine’s Day,” Damone recalled, “and the doctors at Children’s Hospital said the mass above my left knee was cancer. My mom, my family, they all started to tear up. And I was like, ‘So, it’s cancer. We can beat it.’”

It was a rare form of bone cancer that strikes about 600 young people each year. And it struck Damone right after the lean six-footer completed his first dunk and felt his leg buckle underneath him.

“Doctors said if I had my left leg amputated above the knee, I could still do sports, play basketball, you know, all the things I loved. But I had to ask myself, ‘Did I have the strength to wake up everyday, look at an artificial leg and say this isn’t mine?’”

So Damone Clark opted for the second choice: a steel rod shaped like a femur, connecting his hip to a manufactured kneecap. The surgery took 18 hours.

“When I finally woke up,” Damone said, “I asked the doctors, ‘Do I still have my leg?’ When they said ‘yes’ I just smiled and went back to sleep.”

I first met Damone Clark and his younger brother, Devin, about a year and a half ago, after Gabriel Clarke was shot in the stomach on his way to choir practice in Roxbury.

Damone and Devin could relate. Like Gabriel, they also sang in a choir and found themselves mapping out their own safe passages to get to choir practice, with the help of a father figure and patron saint named Emmett Folger, founder and executive director of the Dorchester Youth Collaborative.

A couple of days ago, Folger, who has been honored by the White House for his crusading work, patiently followed Damone Clark as he maneuvered his crutches up the back stairs of the DYC in Fields Corner.

“When things get to be a little too much, when I catch myself crying,” Damone said, “I can always call Emmett. We’ll go out to Tasty Burger or something. He’s my friend, my mentor, a father figure. I’m grateful to have him in my life.”

Folger, now waging his own battle against prostate cancer, called Damone “a personal hero to me. This boy has such strength and yet what I love about him is that he doesn’t hesitate to ask for help.”

On Friday, the day he would have graduated from Sarah Greenwood Middle School, Damone Clark will undergo four hours of surgery to remove a couple of malignant nodules from his right lung.

No, it is not fair.

And still, the soft-spoken teen with the luminous eyes somehow manages a soft smile as he says, “Four hours is nothing.”

First in a series of three columns on Damone Clark’s surgeries and his recovery
"WE CAN BEAT IT": Do- 
meme Clark, along with his 
younger brother, Devin, 
top, has been surviving 
the streets of Dorchester 
everyday. Now, with help 
from mentor Emmett 
Folgert, he is surviving a 
battle with a rare cancer.
Mentor program creates friends, support

The partnership between 12-year-old Leeshaynet Velazquez and her mentor, Ingrid Solano, is the story of friendship, support, and love.

Leeshaynet, who lives at Springfield Housing Authority’s John L. Sullivan Apartments, and Solano, an executive administrative assistant in the Springfield School Department, meet every Tuesday at Edward P. Boland Elementary School.

Leeshaynet is a fifth-grader at Boland and has been meeting with her mentor for the past two years. It’s a relationship she hopes will continue into middle school, and beyond.

“Right away, it was good. We just liked each other, and we could talk about things that were happening in our lives,” explained Leeshaynet. “We’re friends.”

Solano feels exactly the same way, and like Leeshaynet, looks forward to their lunchtime sessions.

“It’s been great,” said Solano, who works in School Department’s finance office. “I love it. We talk about anything and everything. I always ask her how school is going, and if there’s anything going on that she wants to talk about.”

The partnership comes courtesy of Springfield School Volunteers, which matches up students and caring adults at schools across the city. The goals of boosting classroom achievement, reducing absenteeism and ensuring eventual graduation are at play with Leeshaynet, who was identified by officials as a child who would blossom with a mentor.

“We thought that she would benefit from a positive and dedicated adult in her life,” explained Boland principal Lisa Bakowski. “I do think it’s made a difference. We’re seeing the soft side of Leeshaynet. She has someone who talks to her regularly about her life, what she’s been up to.”

Indeed, Leeshaynet loves the conversations she has, and the time she spends, with Solano. They usually catch up on their weekends, talk about school and work, and of course, family life. Leeshaynet is the older of the two daughters of Luis Velazquez and Joselyn Collazo.

“I like how she cares about me,” Leeshaynet said of her mentor. “I like how she worries about me. She’s like a best friend. I feel like I can tell her anything.”

Solano thinks that part of the secret recipe of their relationship is that she herself is a young mother – she had her first daughter at age 19, and that was 16 years ago. She has since had another daughter, who is Leeshaynet’s age.

“I have two daughters. I get what she’s going through. Just knowing that I may be providing for her that one extra spark to become successful, that’s what I love about this,” Solano said.

Both agree that they miss each other’s company over summer vacation, and always look forward to the start of a school year when they can rekindle and catch up.

This September, Leeshaynet is heading off to Chestnut Accelerated Middle School, where she and Solano will continue to meet. Education and academic achievement are key components of their visits, and Leeshaynet loves to talk about her plans for college. She may study journalism, or criminal justice, or nursing, or photography.

She gets advice on that from Solano, who is nearly done earning a bachelor’s degree in human services at Springfield College.

Solano said the rewards she gets from the relationship are many.

“She makes me feel like I have a purpose,” Solano explained. “It’s the joy of spending time with her, and just knowing that in some way, I’m helping her.”

There are currently 195 active volunteers doing work with Springfield students in grades 1 through 12, according to program manager Judy Kelly, who praised the benefits to both children and adults.

“The people who volunteer to mentor students in our Springfield Public Schools are the nicest people,” Kelly said. “Through the mentoring program they establish a trusting friendship with their student. The student benefits by having an objective friend who can listen and offer suggestions for how to deal with some situations that occur in their lives. The mentors report that they are the ones who are receiving the benefits from the relationships. They feel good because they are helping someone to grow and learn.”

Both the Springfield Housing Authority and the School Department give paid time off to employees who mentor in
the school system in Springfield.

To become a mentor, contact the school volunteers office, (413) 787-7015.

Mentor Ingrid Solano with her mentee, Leeshaynet Velazquez, 12, at Edward P. Boland Elementary School. Leeshaynet lives at the Springfield Housing Authority’s Sullivan Apartments.
Springfield Housing Authority's Sullivan Apartments resident Leeshaynet Velazquez, 12, with her mentor, Ingrid Solano, at Edward P. Boland Elementary School.
People & Places

CINDY CANTRELL

PEOPLE

LITTLE BIG FUN: The youngest of three boys, Babson College police officer Javier Valdivieso of Medway always wanted to be a big brother. So last fall, the 26-year-old contacted the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Massachusetts Bay and was matched with 8-year-old Job Pimentel of Waltham.

Job was shy at first, which challenged Valdivieso to think of fun activities they could share. They played video games and with Pokemon trading cards, saw movies, went sledding and swimming, visited playgrounds and the New England Aquarium, hiked together, ate out numerous times, went to the circus, and checked out Waltham's police cruisers and firetrucks.

For their most memorable day together, however, Valdivieso recruited help from his colleagues on the Babson force.

Job and his 9-year-old sister, Nicola — who was accompanied by Ify Mora, her Big Sister through the Big Sister Association of Greater Boston — were recently recognized as honorary junior officers in the Babson College Police Department. After being sworn in, their educational day included a tour of the department's headquarters, a patrol on the Wellesley campus in a police car, and a fingerprinting lesson from Sergeant Fred Winslow and Valdivieso's partner, Officer Kevin Carrigan.

Dispatcher Meghan Rosenberg gave walkie-talkies to the siblings, who helped Valdivieso in writing a ticket for an illegally parked sports car. They also took part in a mock investigation in which they discovered "evidence" with flashlights and placed it in bags.

After ending the day with pizza and ice cream, Job and Nicola both declared that they want to be police officers. Job said his favorite part was "mostly everything." Nicola said police work is appealing because "you can help people and you can make people better."

Valdivieso said he wishes all youth could have a positive experience with police so they know that help is available in whatever form they may need. He is touched by his department's support, and noted that the children and his co-workers still ask about one another.

"Job is a wicked good kid with a heart of gold, and I could not be happier to do what I can for him," said Valdivieso, a member of the US Coast Guard Reserve who is now scheduling Job's visit to the branch's Air Station Cape Cod. "I just hope he's having as much fun as I am."

According to Alexandra Hodgman of the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Massachusetts Bay, more than 800 boys are on the waiting list for a Big Brother. For more information, visit www.bbsmb.org.

LIGHTNING HITS TWICE: For the second time in six months, Ahmad El Haggar of Brookline is performing in connection with a music legend.

On Thursday at 8 p.m., he will take the stage at the Berklee Night at the Pops with Melissa Etheridge at Symphony Hall in Boston. El Haggar, a sophomore at Berklee College of Music, was invited in January by Carole King to perform a new song arrangement with her at the MusiCares Person of the Year ceremony held in her honor in Los Angeles.

The Egyptian native earned his latest opportunity as a winner of the Boston music school's singer/songwriter competition for students and alumni. The 25-year-old will sing his original song, "Mawal El Kurum" (or "The Grapevine Hymn"), in Arabic while playing the oud. He will be accompanied by Berklee senior Moez Dawad of Boston on Arabic percussion and alumnus Ali Amr of California playing the qanun.

The other contest winners, all of whom will be performing under the direction of conductor Keith Lockhart, are Sarah Mckenzie, Sarah Walk, and the founders of a folk duo, the Western Den, Deni Hlavinka and Chris West.

El Haggar said he is excited to be part of the Grammy-winning Etheridge's first-ever appearance with a symphony orchestra.

"It's becoming a habit," he joked, referring to his high-profile encounters. "Good things happen. It's very exciting."

For more information, visit www.bso.org.

ON STAGE: At age 12, Alexa Shae Nizik of Dover is already becoming a Broadway veteran.

Alexa, who began acting at age 7, is playing the role of Alice in Roald Dahl's "Matilda the Musical” at the Shubert Theatre in New York City. Previously, she was Mary Beth in "A Christmas Story: The Musical" in 2012, and an ensemble member alongside Scarlett Johansson, among others, in "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" last year.
Alexa, who is homeschooled and tutored backstage in New York, typically performs in seven out of the musical's eight performances each week. She returns home to see her three older siblings as much as possible, she said, and while in New York enjoys shopping, sightseeing, and spending time with her fellow child actors from all of the musicals in which she has performed.

She said that the cast of “Matilda,” which she joined in January, is particularly close.

“I love being part of this show. Everyone in it has become like my second family,” she said, noting that her contract through September may be extended. “It’s fun to try new things once in a while, but I definitely want to continue acting for as long as I can.”

For more information, visit www.matildathemusical.com.

COMMUNITY HONORS: The Newton-based Synagogue Council of Massachusetts will honor three community leaders during its annual tribute celebration, taking place Wednesday at 6 p.m. at Temple Aliyah, 1664 Central Ave. in Needham.

A Community Service Award will be presented to Newton resident Leonard Da-

vidson, a partner in the Newton-based law firm of Schlesinger and Buchbinder LLP, and former president of Temple Ohabei Shalom in Brookline. In addition, he was a teacher for many years at Temple Beth Elohim in Wellesley.

Rabbi Sara Paasche-Orlow, who also lives in Newton, will also receive the organization’s Community Service Award. She is director of spiritual care at Roslindale-based Hebrew SeniorLife and founder of its Chaplaincy Institute, and helped spearhead the creation of Boston’s first Jewish hospice.

Lawyer Benjamin Sigel of Brookline will receive the K’Lal Israel Award for his leadership on numerous local and national boards, including Combined Jewish Philanthropies (which recently honored him as one of 18 “Chai in the Hub Award” recipients under age 40), Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston, Gann Academy in Waltham, and the American Jewish Committee.

For more information, visit www.synagoguercouncil.org.

People items may be submitted to Cindy Cantrell at cindycantrell20@gmail.com.

Nicola and Job Pimentel, flanked by Big Sister Ify Mora and Big Brother Javier Valdivieso, after helping to ticket a car.