



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF CLEVELAND**

Club Courier

FALL 2010

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SPARK Makes Reading and Math Fun

When first-grader, Kevonna, first came to Ms. Mari's reading program, she was very shy and afraid to read out loud in front of the other kids. She would usually sit in the corner and just listen to everyone else because she was embarrassed that she could not read very well. But as weeks passed and more kids joined the program, Kevonna realized she was not the only one who struggled with reading. She also saw how much fun all of the other kids were having and decided she wanted to be a part of the group.

Now, she looks forward to seeing Ms. Mari every day and is the first to volunteer to read out loud. Not only is she having a great time learning, but her reading skills have dramatically improved.

The program that helped Kevonna become a confident reader is known as SPARK (Spheres of Proud Achievement in Reading for Kids). Supported by The Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, it is an early literacy initiative we have launched in the Broadway and West Side Clubs. This academic year we also expanded the programming into our two 21st Century Community Learning



Kevonna B. reading her favorite book, *A Fine, Fine School*, with Ms. Mari.

Center sites at Walton and Charles Eliot.

According to the 2009-2010 Ohio Department of Education Report Card, Cleveland Metropolitan School District's reading proficiency for third graders is only 54%. This is far under the Ohio proficiency requirement of 75%.

Studies have shown that a child's high school graduation trajectory is often set by the time they enter fourth grade, so SPARK targets first, second, and third graders who are underperforming in reading and math. It utilizes an innovative online program called Kid's College that uses games to help kids learn. What

makes it so effective, though, is its ability to adapt with each child's proficiency level and identify gaps in skill sets.

In addition to Kid's College, Ms. Mari also includes one-on-one instruction, group reading, book reports that members work on with their parents, art activities, and cooking lessons.

"A lot of kids did not realize that reading could be fun when they started the program," Ms. Mari explains. "SPARK has opened their eyes to a new way of learning, and I am amazed at the number of kids who look for me every day so they can participate."

With its multi-faceted approach, SPARK aims to address the confidence gap, as much as the proficiency gap, and is getting results. After the first year of the pilot program, we have found that 100 percent of our participating youth improved in both math and reading. By investing in early literacy programs, we hope to head off future struggles that can lead to low academic performance and high dropout rates.

Third Federal Savings & Loan

When Ben and Gerome Stefanski founded Third Federal Savings & Loan in 1938, they made a commitment to the Slavic Village community. Now led by their son, Marc Stefanski, that commitment continues. In 2007, Marc founded the Third Federal Foundation with a mission of "supporting education and community development," and under the leadership of Kurt Karakul, it has already donated over \$7 million.

Ranging from medical home visit programs, to providing gardens and green spaces, to education support services for families, in only 3 years

the foundation has made a dramatic impact on Slavic Village residents.

At the Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland (BGCC), Third Federal's investment has taken the form of operating support, teen leadership initiatives, and gang outreach programs. BGCC has also been a beneficiary of the service program implemented at Cleveland Central Catholic that has sent several volunteers to the Clubs.

"We strongly believe...it is not sustainable to spend \$40,000 to

\$50,000 dollars a year in punishing so many of our youth when we could spend far less on programs which would teach them the values and life skills to be productive members of our society," shares Mr. Karakul. "Often the children in poor families turn to crime and violence because they have no hope for the future. Programs like those that the Boys and Girls Clubs give them hope and the values and skills they need to complete their education and get good jobs."

Letter From the President



Just another day at the office

Our mission is to inspire and enable young people who need us most to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens.

Dear Friends,

It is hard to believe that the summer is already over. This year we served 18 percent more youth, averaging over 520 daily at our five Clubs and four school sites. This summer our members went on a number of field trips to the Charles H. Wright Museum of African-American History in Detroit, Baldwin-Wallace College, the always popular Cedar Point and Kalahari Water Park, and Ohio State University with new board member LeCharles Bentley, among others.

Locally, we partnered with several area businesses to provide a weekly luncheon program. We took our kids to some of the city's largest companies where they were able to meet and have lunch with staff. Two of our West Side members even obtained jobs as a result of the program.

We also sent several members to Cleveland Clinic's farmers market throughout the summer. Through this unique collaboration, our youth were given tours of the Clinic's kitchen to learn about healthy food choices. They were

then provided with funds to shop for fresh fruits and vegetables at the market that they could take home to their families.

With summer now behind us, we are excited about the opportunities that the new academic year will bring.

Our school sites are continuing into this year, with some slight modifications. Due to the closure of Gracemount, we have moved with the children we serve to Charles Eliot. We have also opened our first charter school site at Imagine Bella Academy.

As you probably know, dramatic changes are occurring in Cleveland public schools this year. With Dr. Sanders' Transformation Plan underway, many new challenges have arisen that the Boys & Girls Clubs is actively involved in solving. Over the summer, our gang outreach staff worked with Cleveland schools at leadership workshops designed to help work towards a smooth transition as former South and East High students moved to East Technical High School.

Once the school-year started, our outreach workers were again on hand, providing transportation to former South High students and working closely with security personnel to prevent violence on campus. Our staff play a critical role in not only preventing violence so students can focus on learning, but also in helping to address the root causes of gang involvement among our youth. We are so grateful to Third Federal Savings & Loan for the investment that enables us to provide this critical service to the community.

As we look ahead, we must stop for a moment and reflect upon the generosity of our supporters. Thank you for making it possible to provide new opportunities for so many of Cleveland's youth.

Ron Soeder

Curious about what else is happening in the Clubs?



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You can find us on Twitter at [Clevekids](https://twitter.com/Clevekids).

Volunteer of the Quarter

Aaron Leshikar has been a volunteer at the Broadway Club since August 2009. He has always been a civically minded individual, volunteering in the past with the Special Olympics and Big Brothers Big Sisters in Texas. When he moved to Cleveland for medical school he began looking for a new place to give back. A fellow student recommended the Boys & Girls Club, and he has been a regular ever since.

Once a week you can find Aaron around the Club doing just about anything. He sometimes tutors the younger kids, but most often he is either in the games room shooting pool or in

the gym playing basketball or dodge ball.

When asked why he keeps coming back to the Club Aaron said, "I really just like the kids. I feel like many of them don't have good role models, and that is what I try to be for them. I don't think many people tell them what they can do. I know they already feel disadvantaged, but I want to let them know they can do what they want to do—it is up to them."

While Aaron enjoys working with all the kids, he is especially fond of the teens. He likes to talk to them about career choices and tries to give them some advice on how to reach their goals. He points out

that it is not always easy to get them to open up, but he works hard to gain their trust and acceptance.

Assistant Club Director, Ms. Jones nominated Aaron for Volunteer of the Quarter because of his dedication and his ability to make sure that the kids are always having fun. She said that he stands out as a volunteer because whenever he is at the Club, his game plan is just to make sure the kids are smiling—no matter what.

If you would like to make a difference in a child's life by volunteering, contact Sherri Buehl at sbuehl@clevekids.org.



Aaron Leshikar (R) playing pool with Anthony D. in the Teen Center.

Long-time Supporters to be Inducted into Hall of Fame

At the 23rd Annual SHAZAM! black-tie gala, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland (BGCC) will induct three long standing board members and tireless advocates into the Hall of Fame. Bill and Viia Beechler and Preston Heller will join the three alumni who were inducted in July; Councilman Zach Reed, Wayne Bilinovic, and Craig Bender.

Preston "Pete" Heller first joined the board in the early 1980's. He was invited on a tour of the Club by former Board Chair, John McDonald, and was instantly sold on the mission.

"As a child, I was raised in an inner-city neighborhood on the south side of Chicago, so I understood the struggles," explains Pete. "The enthusiasm and dedication of the staff and members was contagious. I knew this was something I wanted to be a part of."

Pete has served as board chair and has remained an active member for nearly thirty years. His dedication extends to the national organization, where he has served on the board of the Midwest Regional Council since 1991. Pete was instrumental in bringing a Club to the King Kennedy public housing site, and has continued to provide guidance, leadership, and vision to the current board and staff.

Bill and Viia Beechler joined BGCC in 1976. Both have served in leadership capacities on the board and were the founders of SHAZAM! In 23 years, this event has raised over \$1 million and continues to be our largest fundraiser.

Bill Beechler played a major role in developing the board into the body it is today. He is always the first to the table with new ideas. At the core of his involvement is a drive to help BGCC

grow and serve more youth. His leadership has continued beyond his tenure as Chair, and he is often called upon to provide direction and advice.

Viia Beechler was instrumental in the formation of the Women's Board in 1984. Since its founding, Women's Board members have raised over \$500,000 for school supplies, scholarships, gym uniforms, and many other items that enhance the lives of our youth. Viia has involved many of her friends over the years and shares with them an enthusiasm for addressing the needs of our kids.

Pete, Bill, and Viia have all been such dedicated supporters of the tens of thousands of kids who have come through our doors. We are so grateful for their years of service and feel they are truly beacons of generosity.

"The enthusiasm and dedication of staff and members was contagious."

-Pete Heller

Alumni Corner: John Killings

John Killings joined the Mt. Pleasant Boys & Girls Club in 1994 because his mother wanted to ensure he and his twin brother, James, were in a safe environment every day after school. At the time, John's mother and father were both working to support their four children and knew that the Club would help their youngest sons grow into responsible young men.

John participated in a number of activities including Torch Club, Boy Scouts, Keystone Club, and Quiz Bowls. These programs gave him the chance to travel to regional and national conferences, meet and interact with dignitaries, and

represent the Cleveland Clubs.

When asked how the Club helped him along the way, John responded, "The Club helped me to develop socially, academically, and mentally. All of the staff pushed and encouraged me to do my best...The Club provided me with opportunities I would have never received elsewhere...Being able to travel and meet so many people gave me the confidence and encouragement to strive to be whoever I wanted to be."

Perhaps most importantly, his association with the Club gave him the opportunity to attend college.

Both John and James received the Scholl Foundation Scholarship, as well as annual scholarships from the Women's Board.

Following in the footsteps of their older siblings, the twins have completed their bachelor's programs and are pursuing graduate education. John earned a BA in Black World Studies at Miami University, and is enrolled in the College Student Personnel Program at Bowling Green. He plans to work in a college Office of Multicultural Affairs where he can give back to the community and help all children receive a quality education in college.



John Killings, Mt. Pleasant Alumnus



From left: Brenika G., Deb Toothaker (Women's Board), Clayton H., and Dajah S. at the annual Awards Banquet

Boys & Girls Club Class of 2010

At the Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland (BGCC) we not only strive to help our seniors graduate, but also to support their college studies. This year we were able to provide computers to seniors who graduated and were going on to college or the military. We are also pleased to report that a number of our graduating seniors received scholarship funds from BGCC supporters and our affiliated boards. Congratulations!

Brenika G.: Cleveland State University
Women's Board Scholarship
Bridge Board Scholarship

Clayton H.: University of Toledo
Women's Board Scholarship

Deon S.: Central State University (Sophomore)
Women's Board Scholarship
Bridge Board Scholarship

Dajah S.: Bowling Green State University
Scholl Foundation Scholarship
Amy & Travis Hafner Youth of the Year Scholarship
Bill & Viia Beechler Award for Excellence
Women's Board Scholarship
Bridge Board Scholarship



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Upcoming Boys & Girls Clubs Events

September 30: Nestlé Day of Caring
October 14: Member of the Month Dinner at Brio in Legacy Village
October 16: 23rd Annual SHAZAM! Black-tie gala at the Intercontinental Hotel. (Tickets available at www.clevekids.org)
October 27: Quarterly Family Dinner and BGCC Board Day of Caring at the West Side Club
November 25-26: Clubs closed for Thanksgiving Holiday
December 16: Annual Christmas Party at the Great Lakes Science Center
For more information, visit www.clevekids.org/calendar.asp

To schedule your own volunteer event— please call 216.883.2106 x228

Be the difference...It just takes one.

Meet Isaac. From the beginning, the odds have been stacked against him. Taken from his mother as a baby, he bounced between relatives' homes and the foster care system before being adopted by an aunt. As a teenager, he was known as a fighter who was expelled from multiple schools. When he came to the Club, he suddenly encountered people who cared about his success and encouraged him to turn away from the distractions of the streets and develop his talents. They believed he could be something more, which made him believe it too. In the past year, Isaac has lost three of his closest friends to gun violence. This could have been his fate too, but in June Isaac became the first male in his family to graduate high school and in October he will start college. When you ask Isaac what the Boys & Girls Club means to him, he says frankly, "It saved my life."

Our goal is to raise \$325,000. We aren't there yet, but you can help Isaac and 5,700 other kids like him by investing in their future today. Visit www.clevekids.org/donate.asp or fill out and return the enclosed envelope. Thank you for your support!