



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF CLEVELAND**

Club Courier

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2010 Youth of the Year

"The purpose of life is a life of purpose." So opened Dajah's Youth of the Year speech during the 4th annual recognition breakfast in February. Leading a life of purpose has been the driving force behind everything she has done in the past few years, and her determination is evident immediately upon meeting her.

Defying all statistics, Dajah will not only graduate high school in June, but will also attend Bowling Green State University in the fall; a future she is both excited about and ready to embrace.

Growing up in the King Kennedy public housing complex has been characterized by one struggle after another for Dajah. At 17, she is currently the only member of her family of five that is employed, and she takes responsibility for meeting the needs of her younger siblings.

When she is not working or studying, you can usually find Dajah at the King Kennedy Boys & Girls Club. She became a member when she was 11 years old, and she participated in every program offered. She views the Club as one of



Dajah Spence, Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland's 2010 Youth of the Year. Dajah is a senior at Cleveland School of the Arts.

the most important influences in her life.

"I feel like being at the Boys & Girls Club keeps you off the street. There is always someone you can talk to, especially when things get tough at home," she explains. "It is more than just a place to hang out. It is a family here."

Now she spends her time at the Club tutoring the younger members. She knows she is a role model to the Club kids; something she is mindful of each day and is reflected by the choices she has made.

Despite these challenges and the constant demands on her time, Dajah

is also an accomplished spoken word poet. Through her poetry she finds an outlet to deal with the pain, hardships, and loss she has experienced throughout her young life and look with hope to the future.

She also uses her poetry to inspire those around her to make positive choices. Dajah feels like the success she has experienced through the Youth of the Year program and her acceptance into college show others that it is possible to have a better future. Her message to her community is that these things can be a reality if you keep trying.

"Never give up. Failure is not an option," she says. "Dreams are real and I am living mine."

"Living down here I see potential, but people seem to keep their talents confidential, they fear their lives will be rearranged, thinking negative judgments on the thought of change. I know beyond these black and green gates there has to be some opportunity for us to escape, but we can't seem to turn our dreams into reality because our mentality doesn't appear to follow our own sanity."
~Excerpt, *No Respect*, Dajah Spence

School-Based Programs Expand

In February, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland (BGCC) launched programs at two new school sites, bringing the total number to four.

Harvey Rice, located in the Buckeye/Shaker neighborhood, opened in early February, and with over 100 members, the success experienced within the first three weeks has exceeded expectations. Harvey Rice administration have commented that BGCC is by far their largest after-school program.

The Robert H. Jamison program, located at E. 146th and Harvard, has

also been enthusiastically received, enrolling 54 new members during its first week in operation.

The programmatic focus of the school sites centers around academic success and character development. All four sites offer help with homework during Power Hour, and additional tutoring. The kids also participate in the Triple Play health and wellness program, Passport to Manhood and SMART Girls.

Kevin James, Director of School Based Initiatives, stresses the

importance of these programs to the kids they serve.

"We are providing these children with a safe environment for those critical after school hours. Even though it is structured, it is also a fun place where they can learn about teamwork and improve their academic performance."

As part of our *Decade To BE GREAT*, BGCC looks forward to several more school sites in the future, serving 20,000 Cleveland youth.

Letter From the President



**BGCC President
Ron Soeder**

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

Dear Friends:

In the bustle of daily life at the Clubs, we can sometimes forget to stop and reflect upon all of those in the community who make our work possible. The annual recognition breakfast is a great time to do just that, and this year we were pleased to have so many supporters to honor.

In addition to those we recognized at the annual breakfast, I also wanted to highlight how the contributions of others are bringing quality programming to the thousands of children we serve.

Third Federal Savings & Loan has been a philanthropic leader in Slavic Village and continues to champion our efforts. In December, the bank gave Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland (BGCC) a generous \$25,000 donation to fund youth leadership development initiatives. Third Federal recognizes the challenges that today's youth face and the widespread effects the high school drop out crisis will have on tomorrow's communities. Third

Federal's contribution will enable our community to develop and implement programs that give our teenagers the skills they need to lead themselves and others towards success.

In January, we were excited to officially open the 2010 National Fine Arts Exhibit at Cleveland Public Library's Martin Luther King, Jr. branch. More than a dozen of our kids produced works for the exhibition that was funded by the Lehman Foundation, Target, and the citizens of Cuyahoga County through Cuyahoga Arts and Culture. Nurturing the talent of our youth and encouraging them to think creatively not only builds their self-esteem, but also helps them develop an appreciation for our multi-cultural society.

As First Lady Michelle Obama recently announced, the childhood obesity epidemic is a problem that can no longer be ignored. Here at BGCC, we have been actively addressing the issues of healthy living for many years. Triple Play is an important tool we use to teach our members about healthy eating

and the importance of physical activity. Nationally funded by Coca-Cola and Kraft, this program has also garnered local support by MyCOM, and The Medical Mutual of Ohio Charitable Foundation, a Supporting Organization of The Cleveland Foundation. Through daily sports, fun activities, and informative programs, we are giving this generation of Cleveland youth a starting point on which they can build a healthy future.

In closing, I would like to personally congratulate our Youth of the Year winner, Dajah. She is a wonderful example of what our kids can achieve with the right guidance and support.

Dajah's success story is not only a result of her own unyielding drive, but also the access she has had to programs you have supported over the years. On behalf of all of our members, I would like to thank you, and I look forward to sharing with you more stories of success in the years to come.

Sincerely,
Ron Soeder
President

Volunteer of the Quarter

Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland (BGCC) enthusiastically names Erica New as our Volunteer of the Quarter.

Erica came to the Broadway Club two years ago through the Cleveland Reads program. Her son, Noah, was also a consistent volunteer who, as a young person himself, continued to work with BGCC kids until he left for college.

One of Erica's greatest accomplishments is visible in the work she has been doing with Deviontae. When she first began reading with him, he could only recognize the letter "D." He has

been making remarkable progress and now recognizes several other letters of the alphabet.

All of the children enjoy reading with Erica, but none more so than Deviontae. As soon as she arrives, he is sure to be the first in line to read. Erica never turns him away, even if she is working with other children. She encourages Deviontae to listen to others reading, and continually gives him fun activities he can do on his own.

Erica is a committed volunteer and provides the children with a good example of consistency. Though she is a busy child psychiatrist, she

dedicates herself completely to her volunteer responsibilities. She has become an inspiration to all of the children whose lives she has touched. Gloria Jones, Assistant Club Director, describes Erica as "a great volunteer and a great person with a big heart."

BGCC is grateful to all of our volunteers and recognizes that they are an integral part of our organization's success. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Sherri Buehl, Volunteer Coordinator, at sbuehl@clevekids.org.



Erica New is helping Deviontae improve his reading skills.

Supporting Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow



Outreach Coordinator, Jerry Billups (right), with Butch Davis, South High School senior.

Butch Davis is not unlike many boys in his neighborhood. He has struggled in school and faces pressure every day to participate in illegal activities. Butch could have become just another statistic of the inner-city if it were not for Jerry Billups and other Boys & Girls Club (BGCC) outreach workers.

"Butch is a good kid. He just needs to be pushed. That is what I am here for,"

states Jerry, BGCC and University of Toledo alumnus. "Many of these kids can't relate to their teachers, but they relate to me."

"Jerry really helps me out at school and encourages me to participate in sports," explains Butch. "Without him, I know I wouldn't be doing as well in school."

Through the *Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach* program, Jerry is called to spend much of his working with students that are struggling. He not only acts as a liaison between the school and these students, but he is also a resource for those in need of food, clothing, employment, or just an ear to listen.

Outreach programs play a critical role in fulfilling our mission. Without opportunity and guidance, it is too easy for many of teens like Butch to falter on

the road to the future. By gaining the respect and trust of troubled youth, Jerry is giving them alternatives that do not lead to prison.

What kind of impact can this kind of intervention have on a community? Consider that each day 575 American children are arrested for committing a violent crime or drug offense. In no place is the old adage, "an ounce of prevention" more apparent than when considering the costs of such high youth crime rates. It costs \$1384 per child for a year's worth of outreach services. Compare that to the \$22,650 spent annually to incarcerate one individual in the US prison system, and it is clear these programs are an important investment in the community.

For Butch and many of his peers, an ounce of prevention reshapes their future and can truly save their lives.

"Without him, I know I wouldn't be doing as well in school."

Alumni Corner: Wayne Bilinovic

From 1973 until 1986, if you entered the Broadway Boys & Girls Club there was one face you could count on seeing each and every day. Wayne Bilinovic, the youngest of five children, truly grew up in the Boys & Girls Club. It was a family affair for the Bilinovic family, not only for the children, but also for Wayne's parents who were involved in the local Parents' Club.

To describe Wayne as an "active" member would be an understatement. He participated in programs such as Torch Club and Keystone Club, was an avid basketball player, and was an eager

helper around the Club.

In 1986, Wayne was named Youth of the Year, and finished as the runner-up in the national competition in Washington, DC where he met President Reagan. For him the Youth of the Year competition meant many firsts: his first plane ride; his first trips to New York and Washington, DC; and his first trip outside of the country. That year the five finalists flew to Berlin for a youth conference, where they had the opportunity to visit East Berlin before the fall of the Wall.

Wayne went on to excel at Baldwin-Wallace College, and in 2009 was inducted into the Athletic Hall of Fame. He is currently the Chief Operating Officer of Todd Associates.

His commitment to the Boys & Girls Club has never wavered. In January he became a BGCC board member. He hopes through this new role he is able to help change the lives of today's Club kids. In true Bilinovic tradition, he plans to keep it a family affair by involving his wife and children in various volunteer opportunities.



Wayne Bilinovic, Club Alumni, 1986 Youth of the Year winner, and 2010 Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland Board Member

What can you do to change a child's life?

- ◆ Donate your time working with children in need of positive role models.
- ◆ Financially support the Boys & girls Clubs of Cleveland so we can continue to enable those young people who need us most to reach their full potential.
- ◆ Tell others about the work that we are doing to bring positive change to Cleveland and shape tomorrow's community leaders.

4th Annual Recognition Breakfast

Each year, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland thanks our many generous supporters who make the work we do possible. This year, we invited various donors and civic leaders to the Broadway Club on February 12th to honor their commitment to our mission. Despite the economic recession, we were fortunate to retain the critical support of our donors, and we could not be more grateful for their dedication.

Corporate Citizen of the Year
ArcelorMittal

Board Member of the Year
Gregory Johnson

Parent of the Year
Efrain Ramos, West Side

Volunteer of the Year
Linda Armstead-Perry,
Mt. Pleasant

Heart and Soul Staff Recognition
Jeff Haynes, Broadway

Club of the Year
Mt. Pleasant

Youth of the Year Finalists
Meshellee Goddard, Broadway
Clayton Harris, Heights Youth Club
Heriberto Martinez, West Wide
Marion Richardson, Mt. Pleasant



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Upcoming Boys & Girls Clubs Events

Boys & Girls Club Week activities– March 21-27, 2010

Sunday, March 21, 9-10am– Street Soldiers Broadcast on 107.9FM

Monday, March 22-Friday, March 26– Lifeshare Blood Drive to Benefit BGCC. To sign up for an appointment, contact Amanda Apostol, aapostol@clevelandkids.org or 216.883.2106 x238.

Monday, March 22, 6-am– Basheer Jones & Company Pancake Breakfast at Broadway Club.
Live Broadcast on Newstalk 1490AM.

Tuesday, March 23, 5-7pm– State of Young Cleveland Teen Summit at Broadway Club.

Friday, March 26, 6-9pm– Open Mic Night and Slam Poetry Competition at Broadway Club.

Saturday, March 27, 10am-1pm– March Madness Fight Crime, Invest in Children Teen Basketball Competition at Broadway Club.

Spring Break Hours*– Begin Monday, April 5 ending Friday, April 9.

Youth of the Year State Competition– Friday, April 23-Saturday, April 24 in Ypsilanti, MI.

Aetna's Race for Kids, 5K run/1 mile walk– Sunday, June 20, 9:00am at Progressive Field.

To Schedule Your Own Volunteer Event– Please call 216.883.2106 x228

Curious about what we are doing?

Become a **Facebook Fan** by going to www.clevelandkids.org and clicking on the "Become a Fan" icon.

Or you can follow us on **Twitter**. Search for us under **Clevelandkids**.