

Winter  
2016



# Kids in the CLE

A Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland newsletter



BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS  
OF CLEVELAND

www.clevelandkids.org

## You are helping save lives

*Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland donors are making a difference*

It has been an amazing year – thank you!

In a region with so many great nonprofits, we are grateful you choose to support our kids here at Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland. Your dollars help us operate 15 fun, safe places for the kids who need us most. In return, our Clubs offer excellent value: A University of Michigan study showed Boys & Girls Clubs generate \$9.60 in benefits to our community for every dollar invested.

Here are examples of what your \$50 donation may cover:

- Payroll for all the youth reporters for one edition of Club News, our member-produced newspaper;
- A teen's visit to one of the colleges in our region;



- A music wall for our children's garden;
- 15 packets of seeds for our farm program kids to sow;
- Holiday gifts for an entire family;
- A tank of gas for one of our vans, which take kids to Club sporting events, museums and arts programs;
- Six hours of wages for a kid working in our

entrepreneurial farm program;

- Annual Club membership fees for five kids;
- One hour of music lessons for 12 members;
- Three rakes for kids who work in our gardens; and
- Basketball jerseys for five players.

Taken individually, these are small things. Together, they change lives. You are making it happen, and we thank you.

## Future restaurateur finds roots in the Club

Antonae Norris is studying the restaurant business from the ground up – literally.

The 15-year-old Cleveland Central Catholic High School student is learning how to grow produce as a member of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland's entrepreneurial farm program. For Antonae, it is the first step toward getting a business degree, becoming a chef and owning a restaurant.

"I know I want a flourishing restaurant, four to five stars," she said. "I will cook five-star food."

[See *ROOTS*, Pg. 4]



Antonae Norris

## Virzi named head of farm program

Virzi, who has extensive experience in horticulture and agricultural-based job training initiatives, has been named the new manager of the farm program at Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland.

In her new role, she oversees 10 teen Club members at BGCC's Broadway Club, where they grow and harvest produce. Virzi is also charged with helping the teens develop farm-based job skills, including planning, scheduling, garden maintenance and the selling of produce at local markets.

BGCC's farm consists of two hoop houses, gardens and storage facilities.

"I am honored to have a role in helping teens develop the skills they will need to find and keep employment," Virzi says.

Virzi, who grew up in Westlake and now lives in Medina, attended Denison University in Granville, where she earned a bachelor's degree sociology/anthropology and became interested in environmental studies. After graduation, she moved to Boston, where she did nonprofit fundraising before moving back to Westlake.

She earned a master's degree in environmental studies from The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Wash., focusing on issues of urban ecology. Virzi moved back to Cleveland after graduation and worked in horticulture; for the past four years, she has been a job coach for an agriculture-based job-training program for adults with disabilities.



*Alys Virzi*

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## Teens share feelings about neighborhood violence

Teens got a chance to talk about the pain of seeing their peers murdered and their neighborhoods riddled with crime during an intensive week-long conference convened by Cleveland Peacemakers Alliance. Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland assumed control of Peacemakers one year ago to help combat street violence.

The program was facilitated by LaRon Douglas, a CPA outreach worker and founder of reNOUNce deNOUNce. It is based on Douglas's personal life experience and testimony on gang life, prison and re-entry to society as a productive citizen. He believes that in order to change one's life, it is necessary to change people, places and things – hence the attention to noun in the program name.



For many teens, it was the first time they shared their distress with others.

"The program was a good experience for

everyone – the young people and LaRon. It gave space for expression, venting, understanding, bonding and healing. I appreciate LaRon's approach and using himself to reach these young people in places that most would consider unreachable," CPA Director Sharyna Cloud said.

A team from CPA provided emotional support and helped the youth set individual goals. For most, these goals were aimed at economic independence, including enrolling in job training classes or additional educational courses.

# Butterflies also find safe harbor at new garden

An unused courtyard filled with rocks, weeds and debris at our Broadway Club has been transformed into a garden designed to entice butterflies, bees and hummingbirds, thanks to donors and volunteers.

The new pollinator garden – officially unveiled Oct. 28 – makes the building more attractive and creates a learning laboratory for the approximately 120 kids who attend the Club each day, according to Renata Fossen Brown, BGCC’s director of program operations and an experienced environmental educator. She says the garden “is already getting lots of attention from the kids and staff.”

The garden is the result of about a year’s worth of work by volunteers who planned the new space, removed rocks and soil, put in plants that attract



*Club kids play in the new garden.*

pollinators and installed landscaping features. Bill Soeder Landscaping of Westlake was the single largest contributor to the project, donating design services, plants, trees, mulch and other materials as well as all labor and equipment.

Volunteers from City Year Cleveland and Baldwin Wallace University also helped prepare the site.

Plants in the new garden include: Joe-pye weed, late-season bloomer, perfect for Monarch butterflies to load up on nectar prior to their migration to Mexico; a paw paw tree, the sole source of food for the zebra swallowtail caterpillar; cone-flowers, which attract hairstreaks, blues and skippers for nectar; and bee balm, a nectar plant for eastern tiger swallowtail butterfly.

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## Club helped her read and spell like a champion

Brianna Smith’s mother did not know where to turn.

Her daughter was in third grade but her ability to read was nowhere near where it should have been. So she enrolled Brianna and her brother, Brandon, in the Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland site at Walton School, where both are pupils. There, Brianna received extra help with her reading.

And while it did not happen overnight, she improved her reading skills.

“Her mom brought her here every day – every day,” said Shirlann Lawson, the cadet instructor who coordinates the reading program at the Walton Club.

Brianna, 10, is now in the fourth grade and reading at close to that level. How did she improve so much in the span of less than a year? “I did it by practicing,” she said.

Reading wasn’t the only skill Brianna picked up at the Club. She recently beat out 32 other kids to win a Club spelling competition, a victory that would have been unfathomable even a few months earlier. “Our whole Club was stunned, surprised – and very happy for her,” Lawson said.



*Brianna Smith*

# Our kids are the reporters for Club newspaper

Reading and writing are essential skills for success in today's world. That's why Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland became one of the only Clubs in the nation to publish its own kid-produced newspaper.

Club kids write the stories in Club News, which is published every other month. In addition, our youth snap photos and sell advertising space for the four-page publication. The newspaper has a circulation of 1,500 and is distributed free of charge to members and their families at our 15 Club sites.



Club News reporter Jakayla Douglas, 12, interviews Ryan Easter.



The newspaper's focus is two-fold: to inform members and their families about Club news and to teach kids how to become good communicators. Club news reporters receive guidance from BGCC's communications and arts departments. The editor is East Cleveland Club member Rikki Kyle, a senior at Beaumont School.

Recent stories included a piece on a camping trip taken by Club members, a feature on a youth running club and a question-and-answer profile on Ryan Easter, head of our recording studio. Each edition features Club Talk, in which kids answer a topical question, as well as profiles of a parent and a staff member.

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*[ROOTS, Continued from pg. 1]*

Antonae said her experience with the farm program has shown her how to grow produce and, more importantly, to recognize good quality product. And selling those products at BGCC's farm stand has given her a glimpse at entrepreneurship, marketing, customer service and working with money.

"I know fresh produce. I know when stuff looks good and when it looks bad," she said.

Alys Virzi, who manages the farm program, described Antonae as "clearly driven and self-motivated. When I asked her what she gets out of the Club and the farm program, the first benefit she cited was 'accountability.' My heart smiled."

Virzi said Antonae is an excellent worker. "If I leave her alone to do a task," Virzi said, "I know that she will finish it and that it will be done right. She is respectful and hard-working and gets along with her co-workers."

Antonae is a sophomore at CCC and a member of the school's volleyball team. After graduation, she would like to pursue a business degree from Baldwin Wallace University and go to culinary school. One day she will be able to say the seeds of her career were sown at Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland.

## Why I give



"When I was a small child, my family had some very tough times. We were fortunate in that there was a strong sense of community, people who reached out to help us. I never forgot that. I feel compelled to help those who need us today. Children need hope. I believe that by being involved in Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland and donating my

time, money and efforts, we can give these children hope for a better life."

**Barry Mintzer,**  
Shaker Heights

## Why I volunteer



"It gives me a true sense of purpose to support an amazing staff and the incredible kids who walk through the doors of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland.

"Through Easter egg hunts, pumpkin decorating, and countless homework sessions, I've had so much fun getting to know the kids and supporting their dreams of becoming a nurse, entrepreneur, or even the next LeBron James. The kids who, when I look at them, remind me of my cousins, nieces, nephews, and even myself. I grew up on the east side of Cleveland, in the Collinwood area, where I faced some of the same obstacles that these kids are up against.

"I've been so fortunate to have wonderful mentors and role models throughout my life and I'm committed to paying it forward through my involvement with the Clubs. I volunteer because of a quote by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. that reads, 'Make a career of humanity. Commit yourself to the noble struggle for equal rights. You will make a greater person of yourself, a greater nation of your country, and a finer world to live in.'"

**Yentil Rawlinson,**  
Cleveland

## Viewpoint

### Tribe's excellence extends beyond baseball diamond

The Cleveland Indians' World Series run was truly a joy for all of us.



*Ron Soeder*

What many of you may not know is the Indians off-the-field performance rivals the excellence we witnessed at Progressive Field. The Indians quietly support so many worthy causes in our community, including Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland. We are grateful not only for the philanthropic backing of Cleveland Indians Charities but also for the many opportunities the organization has provided for our kids.

Our Youth of the Year, Zayllianny Mojica, threw out the first pitch at a regular season game and delivered the game ball to the mound in World Series Game 2. It is an understatement to say Zayllianny, a lifelong baseball fan, was excited! In the spring, kids in our baseball program took part in a clinic that included Michael Brantley and Yan Gomes. In another Indians-supported program, Club kids got the chance to practice at legendary League Park. During the World Series, team owner Paul Dolan, MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred and others brought Major League Baseball's Play Ball initiative to our Luis Munoz Marin Club.

We thank the Indians for their commitment to our community.

*Soeder is president of Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland.*

# Events



## Soeder talks on gun violence at TEDx/CSU

Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland President and CEO Ron Soeder was one of the presenters Oct. 21 at TEDx/Cleveland State University. Ron explored solutions to urban gun violence at the event, "Reality Shifts: Are You Ready?"



## Saint Luke's wins inaugural Beechler Bowl

The team from our Saint Luke's Club won the annual Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland flag football championship over Broadway by a score of 38-18 at Case Western Reserve University's DiSanto Field. The game was renamed The Beechler Bowl in honor of the late Bill Beechler, a BGCC board member who passed away this summer. The flag at the field flew at half mast in honor of Mr. Beechler.



## World Series excitement comes to the Club

To kick off the World Series, Major League Baseball took its Play Ball initiative to our Club at Luis Munoz Marin School. Club members received encouraging words from a number of dignitaries, including MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred, Cleveland Indians owner Paul Dolan and BGCC President/CEO Ron Soeder. Also appearing were Boys & Girls Clubs of America National Youth of the Year Jocelyn Woods and BGCC Youth of the Year Zayllianny Mojica (lower right). Kids got to play ball in the gym with current and past players, including Chris Gimenez (lower left), Brian Anderson, Len Barker, Jason Stanford and Super Joe Charboneau.



## Olympian and Club alumnus honored

A reception honoring Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland alumnus and U.S. Olympic boxer Charles Conwell took place Oct. 27 at Cedar Creek Grille. At the event, Charles presented a memento of his journey to Rio de Janeiro to BGCC board member Dr. James P. Anderson, whose support allowed the Conwell family to make the trip to Brazil.

# Highlights



**International Chef Day with Nestlé** was celebrated Oct. 20 at our Broadway Club. Nestlé chefs, who drew applause from our kids as they entered the room, demonstrated cooking skills to Club members ages 6-12. The chefs also gave advice about food choices, presentation and nutrition.



In September, **Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland volunteers** helped clean the Morgana Run Trail, which is adjacent to our Broadway Club. It was part of the Bank's 'Fed it Forward' volunteer program involving about 250 employees. Our kids use the trail to get from Mound Elementary School to the Club each day and for their regular nature walks.



During the presidential election campaign, we dealt with local and national media outlets, including **CNN Money** (shown here interviewing King Kennedy Club Director Richard Starr) and The New Yorker.



Kids in our entrepreneurial farm program received a lesson in farm-to-table operations, thanks to the **Footpath Foundation, Maplestar Farm in Auburn Township, farm owners Jake and Dawn Tretheway and chef Chris Hodgson**. Footpath arranged the trip to Maplestar, where the Tretheways showed the kids how they farm and gave them freshly grown vegetables. Hodgson, a nationally acclaimed chef, presented our crew with freshly made pasta sauce.



The marketing experts at Social Solutions named our Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland publication as one of five **best nonprofit annual reports in the nation**, noting that BGCC "does several things well to personalize their report and help the reader connect

with the mission of the organization." You can view the report and all our publications at [www.clevelandkids.org](http://www.clevelandkids.org).



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## Coming Up

**December 14** | Club volleyball championships,  
Woodling Gym, Cleveland State University

**December 27-29** | Inaugural Catch Me If You Can Basketball  
Tournament, Broadway Club

**March 10** | Breakfast of Champions,  
Broadway Club

## About Us

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