

'Invest in a Child': Woodbridge businessman launches campaign in support of Boys & Girls Club of Greater Waterbury

BY MIKE PATRICK REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

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WATERBURY, CT. 30 November 2018-113018 – From left, Tahleah Cooper, 13, and Janele Lawrence, 12, bag their cookies they made during their cooking program at the Boys and Girls Club of Waterbury in Waterbury on Friday. Bill Shettle Republican-American

WATERBURY – Growing up in the city, Michael Desroches saw the tangible, positive effects the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Waterbury has on the lives of local youngsters.

Now the owner of a boutique marketing firm in Woodbridge, the 1993 Wilby High School graduate has donated his talent to the club. Desroches not only is designing the club’s fundraising campaign, he also launched a concurrent one of his own.



WATERBURY, CT. 30 November 2018-113018 – MadelynYow, 16, a student and volunteer from the Taft School in Watertown looks on as Aiden Campbell, 10, racks up the balls on the pool table at the Boys and Girls Club of Waterbury in Waterbury on Friday. Bill Shettle Republican-American

Both campaigns are called “Invest in a Child,” and are planned, he said, to demonstrate to donors exactly how their money is used to improve childrens’ lives.

“I feel there’s lots of small, philanthropic businesses and organizations or people in the community who can afford \$250 a year to help a child,” he said. “How do we keep telling that story? What does it look like at the end of the year? What

does that \$250 do? It's really about investing in a child, and what that means and how that matters."



WATERBURY, CT. 30 November 2018-113018 – Boys and Girls have fun in the game room taking time to play different games at the Boys and Girls Club of Waterbury in Waterbury on Friday. Bill Shettle Republican-American

Demonstrating that to donors is key for a club that, even seven years on, is still reeling from the flight of donors after a financial scandal involving its previous executive director. The organization was left in financial and physical shambles.

"We're still working to overcome the hurdles that kind of fell upon us a couple years ago," Executive Director Karen Senich said. "While we have had some really great support from the community, our budget is still over \$500,000 and that's a very lean, mean budget. We have to raise the money."



WATERBURY, CT. 30 November 2018-113018 – From left, Noah Kinsey, 6, Raymond Jimenez, 6, and Amanda Roche, 6, all sit at the computer stations doing their homework during their learning session at the Boys and Girls Club of Waterbury in Waterbury on Friday. Bill Shettle Republican-American

MORE THAN 380 CHILDREN were members of the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Waterbury in 2017; most of them were in elementary school, Senich said.

The children participate in homework and educational enrichment programs, sports, field trips, creative activities and more. Meanwhile, parents have the security of knowing their children are in a safe, nurturing environment after school.

The cost to parents per child, Senich said, is \$100. To provide those services, however, it costs the organization more than \$2,000 per child, she said.



WATERBURY, CT. 30 November 2018-113018 – From left, Rayshawn Damon, 9, Kauan Nascimento, 8, and Jordan Ferreira, 8, take time from their studies and play a game together at the Boys and Girls Club of Waterbury in Waterbury on Friday. Bill Shettle Republican-American

“Our programs are so much stronger and we’re always trying to find a way to serve more children,” Senich said. “But frankly, we are right now at capacity for the younger kids, and the only way for us to serve more – and there is a demand – is for us to be able to raise the money to increase our budget to bring on more staff.”

But some funders who left after the embezzling conviction of its former executive director have never come back, she said – an indication to her there’s still some reluctance among the philanthropic about investing in the Boys & Girls Club.

Desroches, who joined the club’s board a year and a half ago, said those fears, at the close of 2018, are unjustified.

“If they knew what Karen was doing, what they’re doing at the club is amazing,” he said, calling the 2011 scandal “a part of history” that isn’t happening

anymore. "There's so many kids being affected positively by the club every year. I just hope people see past that (scandal)."

HE'S BRINGING THAT message not just to potential donors in the Greater Waterbury community, but to the clients at Brand Inspiration, the marketing firm of which he is founder and principal.

"I can go to my clients and say, 'This is what I believe in, and I would love if you would support it as well,'" he said.

Because the club is a United Way agency, Senich said, it's barred from fundraising from September through November, when the United Way conducts its workplace donor campaign from which the club benefits.

Now that the three-month ban is over, Desroches said he'll send out appeal emails to his clients this week.

"They're all philanthropic," he said. "I just want them to be philanthropic toward the club."

DESROCHES IS STILL in contact with his former school friends via Facebook, and said he'll reach out to them as well to tap into what Senich calls an "untapped resource" for donations – alumni.

The club has few records that would allow the tracking of alumni, and often has relied on them reaching out independently to the club.

One group provides pizza and bicycles to raffle off every year at the club's holiday party.

"We're always trying to pull more names together. We don't have the addresses," she said. "Certainly if there are alumni out there, send us an email, friend us on Facebook, stop by and see us."

Donations to the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Waterbury can be made online at bgcgwater.org or mailed to 1037 East Main St., Waterbury, CT 06705.

Contact Mike Patrick at mpatrick@rep-am.com, on Twitter @RA_MikePatrick or on Facebook at RA.Mike.Patrick.

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