

Program needs more Big Brothers

BY KIM KOVIELL
STAFF WRITER

Although Jay Hughes thought about mentoring for a long time, it wasn't until a year ago that he loosened the reins on his tight work schedule and took the plunge.

"I was so focused on career," said Hughes, a 32-year-old Farmington Hills resident and supply chain consultant at Cardinal Health. "At some point I woke up and realized there's more important things in life than working 14 hours a day."

Hughes shifted his priorities last June, when he applied to become a mentor with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metropolitan Detroit. Five months later, he was paired with Donovan Dennis, an 8-year-old from Southfield.

"I would hope that my influence with him or on him would help him to try new things and embrace new things," said Hughes, who had done some mentoring back in high school and college. "What I've seen is there's been a big change in him in the last six months."

He said that during his time with Dennis, he has watched the third-grader ease out of his "comfort zone" and try new activities such as bike-riding.

According to Donovan's mother, Adrienne Peterson, Jay arrived out of nowhere soon. Peterson had enrolled Donovan in the program in December 2001 and had been hoping for a match for almost a year.

"It was well worth the wait," said Peterson, an account specialist with CH Robinson in Southfield. "Jay is just a great guy. Donovan adores him."

Though Dennis was raised by strong female figures including his mother, grandmother and aunt, Peterson said she also wanted Dennis to have a "strong male positive influence."



Jay Hughes loves spending time with his Little Brother, Donovan Dennis.

"I cannot raise a man, I can raise a good person," she said. "It gives him someone that he can talk to about 'boy things... that's Donovan's words."

Now, for the past six months, Hughes has been filling this role in multiple ways. For instance, he has been teaching young Donovan the importance of chivalrous manners.

"Hold the door for ladies, and ... ladies get first," the Leonard Elementary student readily explained. "It's a nice thing to do. Usually they think that's so nice. I make a lot of friends at school."

Hughes also has used his role to reinforce lessons taught by Dennis' mother. "He taught me that it's a bad

thing to do drugs and smoke," said Dennis, adding that he sees Jay as a best friend.

Together, the two have tried everything from camping and bowling — Donovan's two favorite pastimes — to ice skating, playing video games and biking. Hughes also attends Dennis' pee-wee baseball and soccer games, cheering him on from the sidelines.

However, Hughes asserted that he tries to be more of a "Big Brother" than a father figure.

"It's a very fine line," said Hughes, who chooses to visit Dennis nearly every weekend, more than the required four hours per month. "The program isn't set up to find moth-

ers and fathers. My job is just to be a role model. More a friend, I would say."

And in a way, Hughes is a role model for more than just Donovan Dennis.

According to David Lingham, Development Director for the metro Detroit program, out of the 672 children who are currently paired within the three counties, more have Big Sisters than Brothers.

"We don't have enough Big Brothers," said Lingham. "I think people think you need to be the perfect person, people think that it's a lot of time. It's just as long as there's a regular contact."

"Hughes' commitment serves as a sterling example.

"Jay's just the epitome of a good Big Brother," Lingham added. "His Little Brother is a lot more comfortable in himself than he was six months ago. They both have a lot of respect for each other. I don't see them ever losing touch."

Dennis agrees, and is already looking forward to heading to Cedar Point with Hughes this summer and, eventually, driving over to Hughes' house to visit. He's considering becoming a Big Brother himself someday.

"I'd like to do that definitely 'cause our people might be sad and I'd like to cheer them up," said Donovan, "and it seems like a very nice thing."

Although Hughes' job will likely require him to move in another 24 months or so, he doesn't plan to abandon his role in the life of Donovan and possibly others.

"Absolutely I would want to continue doing this," said Hughes, who hopes to have children of his own someday.

"Once you have a chance to see how excited the child is to have you in their life, you can't break away from that."

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St. John's celebrates new church facility

St. John Lutheran Church of Farmington Hills celebrated the dedication of its new church facility on June 1.

The "Together in Faith" building campaign began in late 2000 and groundbreaking took place in spring 2002. The new facilities include a worship center seating 350, a two-room nursery for infants and toddlers, a large entry area, a gym for recreational activities and full restrooms, office and parking for 150 vehicles.

According to Pastor Dan Cave, who has been with St. John since 1991, "Our building project has been in the works since 1998. It has been a labor of love by many, many members of the congregation who share a vision to make St. John a welcoming, growing and serving

church offering a variety of ministries to the greater community. Worship has always been a big part of our church's life."

The new facilities will help provide new, more effective ministries to the community, Cave added.

"This summer, St. John offers a traditional worship service at 9:30 a.m. every Sunday and a contemporary praise service at 11 a.m. Sunday school for all ages resumes Sept. 7. Vacation Bible School for pre-school and elementary age children is planned for Aug. 11-15 as well as a Fall Open House and Children's Festival on Sept. 6 and 7.

For more information call the church office at (248) 474-0584. The church is located at 23225 Gill Road.

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