

## **A COMMUNITY LESSON IN GIVING YMCA YOUTH PROGRAM RAISES CLASS AND MEMBERSHIP MONEY FOR LOCAL FAMILIES WHO CANNOT AFFORD TO JOIN**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Brittany Behr likes to swim. The South Broward Family YMCA near her Hollywood home has a swimming pool and offers lessons.

It sounds like a natural match, but Brittany's mother, Nichole, is a single mother working to raise her daughter and just couldn't afford the cost of a Y membership and the lessons.

Enter Jeff Cowan, a community volunteer at the South Broward Y and the agency's Partners With Youth program.

"No one gets turned away from the Y because of race, creed or their inability to pay," explained Cowan who serves on the Y's board of directors and chairs the yearly Partners With Youth community campaign to raise money for membership scholarships. "Some people receive a full scholarship while others receive partial help," he said.

Scholarship funds help area residents to take part in a myriad of activities hosted by the YMCA including sports, swimming, aerobics, gymnastics, and computer training.

"We have between six and eight hundred children in our after-school program every day," explained Scott Mounts, District Vice President for the YMCA and Director of the Hollywood facility. "We provide a preschool program for 40 kids and a summer day camp program."

In addition, Mounts is proud of his agency's water safety program that trains 60 children every two weeks in how to take care of themselves near the water.

"The scholarship program paid for 2,500 memberships last year," Mounts said "The total cost for that is \$438,000."

Mounts said that generous corporate grants and gifts from many community agencies take care of most of the cost, but the YMCA runs about \$87,000 short of the money needed to provide all of the scholarships requested.

That's where the Partners With Youth effort comes in. "It's a grassroots effort to raise those funds," Mounts explained. "Those who give feel good knowing that they helped a child to participate in the YMCA."

Cowan knows the feeling. "Years ago I belonged to private gyms and found out that after you paid your membership, they usually went out of business," he remembered. "Then I joined the Y and learned that even through a difficult financial period, they didn't close their doors. Community businesses and organizations like FPL chipped in to keep it going. That meant a lot to me."

Now, Cowan, who owns Target Autos, Inc. in Hollywood, is encouraging his fellow residents to help the YMCA offer scholarships to needy kids.

Not only that, he is using his business to support people in need and the Y. “When I repair cars, I take from the community through my business. Working with the Y is a way that I can put money back into the community where it is needed.”

In addition to chairing the scholarship campaign, Cowan also takes donated cars, repairs them at his auto shop, sells them at a low price to those in need, and donates the profits to the YMCA. “That’s a project that benefits everyone,” he explained. “The owner who donates a car gets a tax write-off, the low-income person who buys it gets a reliable car, and the YMCA benefits from the sale.”

Nichole and Brittany, 6, are grateful for all of the efforts by Cowan and local contributors. “It’s very beneficial for us,” Nichole said. “Brittany likes to swim and take gymnastics and I’m able to do aerobics at the Y while Brittany is swimming. I would hate for her not to be involved in something that she enjoys. It’s very beneficial.”

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