

RELATIONSHIPS FOR A LIFETIME

Troy Mentors Around Every Corner

Joshua Smith, although not a stranger to hard work, was able to see his full potential through the eyes of the Troy mentors who encouraged him along the way. Josh is a Troy High School graduate, class of 2001.

“No one in my family had ever gone to college. We were a blue collar family. Both of my parents taught me to work hard. My dad worked third at Hobart Brothers, and my mom was a secretary at the Hyatt Center and at Stouder Hospital,” Josh said. His mom pushed for him to keep his education going after high school so that he could get ahead and have financial stability as an adult.

“Even with working all of my summers in landscaping jobs and with all of my savings and the loans I could take out, I still didn’t think I’d be able to go to school. My football coach Steve Nolan introduced me to Bill Lohrer who was leading The Future Begins Today (TFBT) at the time. Between those guys and Alan Zunke, I found out there was a way to make it happen. They made my academic pursuits possible. And, the Last Dollar Grant (LDG) was a godsend for me.” Josh applied for and received a LDG for the four years following high school graduation. He chose Bowling Green State University, because his friends and he thought it had the same feeling as being in Troy.

“Troy was a great place to grow up. There was always someone to help me stay on a good path or get through rougher times in high school. If things weren’t always right at home, or if I was in a social situation and needed a little guidance, I

had someone there for me. It was a good influence on me to be involved in sports too.” Retired head football coach, Steve Nolan remembered coaching Josh on and off the field, “Josh always had a look in his eyes like he wanted to get something done. He pushed himself and understood the importance of working toward something. We saw a lot of potential in him. I never thought he’d get into education though; it even surprised me when he made the choice because he was pretty quiet at first. But something clicked with him, he came out of his shell, and he got into coaching and teaching right after school.”

Josh said, “It was important to me, like many people at that age, to find close friends to rely on in high school.” He and Mike Johnson have remained good friends since that time, and Josh still visits with Mike’s family. Mike’s mother Laurie spoke with pride about Josh, as if he were a relative, “When Josh was growing up I spent a lot of time with him. He worked so hard, did well at sports and studied because he decided he wanted to go to college to better himself. I know him as the adult he has become, and he has grown into such a great person and father.”

“I picked up lifelong values that I’ve gotten to take with me into my adult life and into teaching and coaching.” Today, Josh gives these same positive influences to his students. He is in his 12th year teaching at Piqua Junior High School. He also coaches varsity football and track. “I like to teach because things are constantly



Josh, his son Collin and wife Katie

changing, there are new approaches to learn, and no two kids are the same. My co-workers push me to be my best, which only helps the students in the end. I get to positively impact these kids.”

While a four-year college isn’t the only institution of training or higher education that the TFBT’s Last Dollar Grants can support, this was the avenue that worked for Josh. He said, “I remember not feeling driven enough to follow the steps to transfer from a community college into another program at that age. So without the scholarship, I know that I couldn’t have gotten the education I received. And even though \$1,200 or \$1,500 a year doesn’t sound like a lot to some that was enough money to see my education through. It meant so much to me and so did the people.”

Josh said, “My personal success is being happily married for seven years and getting to teach my son.” Because of his career, Josh met Katie, his wife, who teaches

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health and is the head athletic trainer at Piqua High School. Collin is their four-year-old son. “I’d like him to learn that it’s important to take advantage of opportunities and to make the most of them. I hope he experiences school in a positive way in more than just academics, that he embraces the people, the extra curriculars, and makes the most out of it.”

“My advice for future Last Dollar Grant kids is to know the importance of sticking with your education choice and to finish up. Even though you hit rough patches, see it through. Keep up with your investment, because it will pay off more than just money-wise.” Joshua graduated from Bowling Green State University in 2005 working his hardest

to earn around a 3.0 grade point average. He continued his education with a master’s degree from Wright State University in 2010. Steve Nolan is a former trustee for TFBT. Alan Zunke, a retired principal for Troy City Schools, is the current chair of TFBT. Laurie Johnson is a trustee for TFBT and a realtor for Coldwell Banker.

FUNDING THE FUTURE

MainSource Bank, Loyal Friends

Lisa Schelin, Mike Mengos, Ed Westmeyer, Linda Pittenger, Mona Anderson, Brittany Phillips, Les Lee, Jacki Kirtley, Kesha Starliper, Diana Davis – These are just a handful of the folks from MainSource Bank who have gone above and beyond for the students of The Future Begins Today.

Market President Diana Davis says, “Because the mission of The Future Begins Today supports our leaders of tomorrow, our employees have had a long history in backing the organization and appreciate the opportunity to provide service to Troy’s youth. What we do is a small token that I know will go a long way to benefit the students who need it most.”

A commitment to the organization emerged more than two decades ago when Ron Scott, then-president and CEO of People’s Savings Bank, became one of the original TFBT trustees. Members of this banking family have either served as TFBT trustees, volunteered as Lunch Buddies, worked shifts at the TFBT Strawberry Salsa booth at the Strawberry Festival, given financially to the organization, or have spent their free time at youth events.

When asked why becoming a Lunch Buddy was important to him, Business Development Manager Les Lee shared, “It scares me to think how different my life would have been without the positive influence of mentors, coaches, teachers, and counselors I had when I was growing up. Volunteering in the community is something I have done for 35 years to try to have the same kind of impact on the kids who need it. ***Being a Lunch Buddy for The Future Begins Today is my way of trying to repay the heroes from my childhood.*** My student at Kyle Elementary seems to look forward to our lunch visits as much as I do!”

MainSource Bank recently sponsored refreshments for TFBT’s Last Dollar Grant awards ceremony where 27 Troy students were awarded more than \$41K in grants to continue their training or education beyond high school. In the fall, a TFBT Family Event was held at Hobart Arena for an afternoon of skating fun for more than 90 participants. This was made possible with a partnership between Hobart Arena, Troy Skating Club, and, of course, MainSource Bank. Their mascot, Sunny the Supersaver, even came by to give prizes to the students! As an incentive for our students’ academic



L to R, Caroline Rohlf, Les Lee, Executive Director of TFBT Natalie Rohlf, Mike Mengos

and attendance accomplishments this school year, several quarterly incentive gift cards from Culvers were provided by the bank. The two branches in Troy, South Market Street and West Main Street, took the competitive spirit up a notch this past spring by holding a TFBT Strawberry Salsa selling contest between the two locations. This resulted in more than \$1,500 in salsa sales for the organization! Profits from Strawberry Salsa sales benefit the Last Dollar Grant program.

Client Service Manager Mike Mengos has served on TFBT’s board of trustees since 2015. “Our salsa competition is an exciting way to engage with our customers, to encourage our staff, and to TRY to earn the title of ‘Senor Salsa’ between the two branches. Plus it just tastes great. One of my favorite parts of the year is working with the students in the salsa tent at the festival. They are great workers, and I get to know the young adults who are able to go to school because of our staff’s help.” In addition to his salsa marketing, for several years Mike has shared his time as a TFBT volunteer for the Van Cleve 6th Grade Building’s field trip to Edison State. The annual “Kids to College” program is a collaborative effort amongst Troy City Schools, The Ohio State University Extension Office and The Troy Foundation. Students learn about financial literacy and are introduced to ways to wisely use financial resources in a real-world setting. Mike also volunteers at TFBT youth events and has served as a vocational guest speaker for TFBT Club students to learn about the banking profession.

TFBT’s Strawberry “Sweet Heat” Salsa may be found at these local vendors:



A Familiar Match

Mentors within The Future Begins Today's programs might come across an occasional "a-ha moment" or break-through situation when they work with our Troy students. Sometimes you can almost watch a lightbulb go off. When she starts to take responsibility for her slipping grades by enrolling in Homework Helper because her Cs and Ds aren't cutting it; when a new high school graduate, who is known for being irresponsible with paperwork, turns in his scholarship application early AND fully completed; when an elementary kiddo asks if she can stay at a TFBT Family Event just a little bit longer because she doesn't get to have many times like this one with their mom otherwise...

But Lunch Buddy volunteer, Betty Elliott, had a different kind of break-through moment that struck between her and her 8th grade student, Olivia Kohn.

Betty was first matched as a Lunch Buddy to Olivia when she was in the 6th grade at Van Cleve. They have been spotted in school buildings having their once-a-month lunch dates. They even raise the bar from what you might imagine a school lunch to look like to encourage Olivia to help her set the table. "We like to maximize our time together, so I bring in lunch occasionally so that we can spend more time together instead of waiting in the school lunch line."



For various reasons in this program it can take a while for a mentor to get to know a student fully or even share family members' first names. Olivia's mother said that before this Olivia was really shy. Olivia was sure to tell TFBT that, "She makes time to talk to me and listen to what I have to say. Betty is so nice and caring and thoughtful."

After building a trusting relationship, they were able to delve a little deeper. Betty asked Olivia about her grandmother. "She talked so often and so highly about her grandmother, Sherry Johnston, who had grown up in Piqua. Since I also grew up in Piqua, I figured there was a good chance that I would know her. So when she told me her grandmother's maiden name (Fogt), I realized then that we shared a family tree!"

Betty reached out to extended family members to look through old albums and a photograph was eventually found of their mutual relatives. Olivia's mom, Pam Calendine, works at the Forest Hill Cemetery in Piqua and researched records that were available to her. Pam shared, "Her time with Betty has allowed her to try things she wouldn't normally try and to have more conversations. TFBT has really helped build her confidence and self-esteem. First she was paired with someone awesome, then we found out that we are relatives! Our family thought it was really funny!"

"How interesting that we are Lunch Buddies AND related? I'm really lucky to be with this sweet girl and to get to see her become a young lady. It's been a joy to be a part of this program. I'm surprised how comfortable it is," said Betty.

It's as if this Lunch Buddy pair had one of those break-through moments where they could said, "This match was meant to be," or "It feels like I've known her all my life."



Pictured are the children of John Fischer seated. Top row, far left is Clara Fischer, Olivia's great-great grandmother on her mother's side. In front of her, bottom far left is George Fischer, Betty's grandfather.

Aviation Invasion

It is the mission of WACO Learning Center to "Preserve the past...inspire the future." And for the past decade, The Future Begins Today and WACO have done just that. Together, the organizations inspire Van Cleve 6th Grade Building students through the program known as "Aviation Invasion." This is guided by WACO board members and volunteers who for two days lead students through engaging activities and educational stations. More than 3,000 Troy students and staff have now experienced this science, math, history and aviation-focused program thanks to the generosity of The Troy Rotary Foundation and The Paul G. Duke Foundation!





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