

Trinity Head Offers Leadership by Example with Big Brothers Program

Written by Eric Junco
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In spring 2003, Trinity CEO Bill Leaver hosted a breakfast for the leaders of 30 local companies. That meeting has helped Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Quad Cities nearly triple the number of children it mentors.

“Out of that one breakfast, and Big Brothers Big Sisters' follow-up with the CEOs, we have been able to recruit around 350 additional volunteers,” said Jay Justin, CEO of the Quad Cities organization.

According to Justin, for the five or six years before Leaver became involved with Big Brothers Big Sisters in 2002, the number of children the organization was able to match with mentors was stagnant at around 200. This year, Big Brothers Big Sisters has more than 600 matches. That puts the local group well on its way to a goal of having 1,000 matches of children and mentors by 2010.

Last month, United Way of the Quad Cities Area gave Leaver its “Impact Leader Award” for his involvement with Big Brothers Big Sisters.

At the 2003 breakfast, Justin said, Leaver “walked through the philosophy of why Trinity is getting involved [with Big Brothers Big Sisters] and then gave us an opportunity to give a

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presentation about what our program is all about. We then asked each CEO if we could come and talk to them one-on-one about levels of involvement. According to Justin, roughly 90 percent of the CEOs made a commitment to Big Brothers Big Sisters following the Trinity breakfast.

Leaver said he knew he wanted to get involved with the organization long before Trinity and Big Brothers Big Sisters collaborated. His wife and daughter had both previously been big sisters in Michigan before moving to the Quad Cities. Leaver presently has a little brother named Gabriel at Horace Mann Choice Elementary School in Rock Island.

“Generally what I do twice a month is bring him lunch,” Leaver said. “We sit and go over what he is going through in his life. I also touch base with his teacher.”

Leaver explained that he became involved with Big Brothers Big Sisters in 2002 after looking at the incidence of disease in the Quad Cities.

“It was apparent that the Quad Cities were higher [in disease] and unhealthier than national averages...,” Leaver said. “It got us thinking at Trinity: How do we influence that?”

Leaver ultimately decided that the best way to attack health problems in the community was to provide young people with role models for healthier lifestyles.

“He believes that kids' behavior and health are learned and modeled by the adults that are involved in their lives,” Justin said. “He felt philosophically that Big Brothers Big Sisters was a fit for Trinity because Trinity is in the business of making and keeping people healthy.”

In addition to hosting the business breakfast, Leaver said, he and Justin were able to persuade all 12 senior board members of Trinity to participate in Big Brothers Big Sisters' school-based mentoring program at Horace Mann. Most of those board members are still active in the organization today. In that “Lunch Buddies” program, mentors have

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lunch with an assigned child once a week during the academic year.

As part of its effort to expand its reach, Big Brothers Big Sisters has implemented two new "delivery systems" in addition to its intensive one-on-one mentoring. Traditionally, big brothers and big sisters are supposed to spend 10 hours a month with the children they're mentoring. The newer "lunch buddy" and site-based programs require less time commitment from mentors, Justin said.

According to Justin, the Big Brothers Big Sisters typically has a waiting list of about 120 children. "The difference between four years ago and today with our waiting list is that kids four years ago would stay on the waiting list," Justin said. "Now when a kid comes in to sign up for our programs, we offer them three options. Their number-one preference might be the [intensive] community-based program, but if we don't have a volunteer that matches the profile of the child for the community-based [program], we offer the school- and site-based programs as alternatives."

In addition to increasing the number of mentor matches, Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Quad Cities is moving from its current office at 131 West Third Street in Davenport to its own building at Fifth and Main. Justin said the group plans to move in by November 1.

"Right now we have raised \$490,000 of this campaign toward our goal of \$550,000" to acquire and renovated the building, Justin said.