



Boys and Girls Club of Dane County trying to expand on record-breaking year

Celebration set for Friday

Author: David Dahmer, Madison365

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The 7th Annual Hearts for Helping Wine & Cheese Event will be held Friday at the Concourse Hotel in downtown Madison. The Boys & Girls Club of Dane County is asking the community to celebrate, collaborate, and renew its partnership with BGDC to ensure its young people will have the opportunity for a successful future.

"We're trying to raise \$190,000 to support the programs at Boys and Girls Clubs. We're expecting about 600 people," BGDC President and CEO Michael Johnson told Madison365. It will be probably be the largest fundraiser to date for this Boys and Girls Club. We are raising the bar." ◊

The Boys & Girls Club provides at-risk youth with the opportunity to learn and grow in a safe, fun and nurturing environment six days a week. Club members participate in educational activities, creative & performing arts, college preparatory programming, and sports and recreation. In addition those services, each member is served a nutritious meal every day.

The 7th Annual Hearts for Helping Wine & Cheese Event is the BGDC's signature event and every year the Madison Concourse Hotel is the site for an elegant evening of food, fun and music that will showcase some of the finest wines and cheeses Wisconsin has to offer. There will also be a silent auction.

"There's going to be some great music at the event. Kinfolk will be performing — they are one of the best bands in town," Johnson said.

"It's a great networking event. Almost every major CEO in town is going to be there," Johnson said. "It's a great opportunity to chat with

business leaders in our community."

It's also a chance for the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County to honor outstanding individuals with their 2016 Hearts for Helping Humanitarian Awards. This year's awardees are Anthony B Cooper, Jae Prior, Atonye Adjei Marsh, Rafael Ragland and Dwayne Malone. "They helped organize getting 30,000 gallons of water for Flint residents," Johnson said.

Collectively, these five honorees have also helped organize art projects featuring local kid's talents, volunteered at local Thanksgiving events, helped to renovate Allied Boys and Girls Club, helped young men stay out of correctional facilities and helped raise funds to secure toys for kids over the holidays.

Johnson is hoping to build on a banner year in 2015 that saw BGDC graduate 112 seniors, of which more than 70 percent are students of color. All were accepted into college. BGDC now has the largest public/private partnership in both the Madison and Verona school districts with more than 1,500 students enrolled in their college prep programs.

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"We had a record-breaking year in 2015 and have served a lot of kids. The impact that we've been able to have has been phenomenal," Johnson said. "It was, by far, the strongest year we've had in the history of our organization."

But, Johnson wants to do even more. Last month at a press conference at the Boys and Girls Club, American Family Insurance Dreams Foundation, the Milwaukee Bucks and the Burke Foundation announced \$3.3 million in donations to help grow AVID/TOPS, a college preparatory program for minority, low-income and first generation students.

"The data shows that we are actually helping to move the needle in this city for our kids," Johnson says. "We have a lot of work to do and we will keep our eyes on the prize. It takes significant resources to address these issues and we're committed to doing that. I'm thankful for the fact that the community is investing in our educational programs and investing in our kids."

Johnson said that there is still time to get registered for the 7th Annual Hearts for Helping Wine & Cheese Fundraiser.

"It's a fun event. When you come to this event, you will have a great time," Johnson said. "But, most importantly, it's for a great cause. We served 5,000 young people last year. We had 112 of our kids graduate and go to college. We have almost 300 kids in college right now. Every year, we have stepped it up for our kids. We are thankful for the community support. For whom much is given, much is due. We understand that. We recognize that."

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