

## Lessons learned at the Northern Westchester Boys & Girls Club

BY STUART MARWELL

**A**s a child who grew up in Mount Kisco, some of my fondest memories were my childhood experiences at the Boys & Girls Club. I started to attend the club at age 13 when I was in the eighth grade. The school bus from Fox Lane stopped there every day after school and a great number of kids got off that bus every day to participate in club activities.

For the Marwell family, the club was a center of activity and a real family affair. My mother, Grace Marwell, was a parent volunteer and all of my three siblings regularly participated. I attended daily, and this was an important part of growing up in Mount Kisco, an important part of my life, family and education.

The Boys & Girls Club was a wonderful place and it was very progressive. For example, while not all of society was integrated, the Boys & Girls Club has always been open, with equal access to all, no matter what their race and ethnicity, as it is to this day. Any divisions of the outside world simply disappeared. It was a place of

nurturing and support, a place where people learned to get along and enjoy being with each other, to learn from each other. Invaluable life lessons were taught, many of which have served me to this very day.

I learned to socialize and get along with others. The club fostered harmony and taught us to seek out commonalities and connections with others in fellowship and friendship. We learned how to build bridges of understanding with one another, to respect each other and to find value in each person. To this day, I always seek to lift people up and never to put them down.

I learned to trust, for example, on the trampoline. We jumped high, did flips and engaged in this sport with the knowledge that someone else would be the spotter, to provide the support in case we fell, to hold us up when we needed it and to be there to assure we landed right. It taught us security. Sometimes in life we are the jumper and sometimes we are the one who has the other's back. Understanding this was crucial in my development.

The club taught us social responsibil-

ity. We were urged to contribute to our community. We planted willow trees in Leonard Park that are still standing today. We participated in the Reader's Digest Penny Drive and the UNICEF collection, and other such actions. We joined together to make a difference and even as kids we realized that positive contributions, no matter how large or small, would help to make a better world. We always tried to do our part and we felt really good about it.

I learned the basics of leadership. One of the popular activities at the club was the study of American Indian culture. We established a "tribe" and designed and made all of our beadwork, clothing and headdresses, etc. I was the chief of the tribe and that taught me how to communicate and how to inspire action and to get a positive response out of people, how to motivate and how to establish trust and confidence.

Today, as president and CEO of an international company, I have the responsibility for a thousand people's employment, which affects their entire families, their well-being and their livelihood. I strongly believe that some of the early les-

sons learned first at the Boys & Girls Club were the first preparation for this tremendous responsibility.

Now, more than 50 years later, I am still a part of the Boys & Girls Club and the club will always be an intrinsic part of me. Back then, I was a club member, and today I am a board member, and my connection to the club has never really changed. I am immensely proud of the organization on its 75th anniversary. Today, there are new facilities, a larger staff and many more services for a larger population of children. It is an exemplary place that directly helps many families and children reach their highest potential. It is a place that will always have an important place in my heart, and I am honored to be recognized as Humanitarian of the Year by the club during their award dinner on June 7.

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