

## Island Forum: Boys & Girls Club needs community to rally for youth

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Laurie Hornor, Peter Zajac  
Island Forum

When Garrison Keillor wrote about his hometown, he may have been writing about life on Mercer Island. I'm not so sure about strong women and good-looking men, but certainly all of our children are above average.

With the economic downturn we are now in, it has become all too apparent that our lake is Washington and not Woebegone. Lost jobs and diminished investments have affected people we know. Our feeling of well-being is challenged by the news that seems to get worse each day. It is in these tough times that our sense of community buoys us. People here care.

In this time of need and spirit of caring, the Boys & Girls Club will be calling March 2, 4 and 5 to ask for your support. The Club's annual Phone-A-Thon provides funds for scholarships and operating overhead. Your donation is vital.

The Mercer Island Boys & Girls Club provides our children with quality programs, activities and care regardless of financial situation. For nearly 40 years, the Club has offered a fun, safe and constructive environment where youth imagine, learn, play and develop lifelong values and capabilities such as fairness and leadership. The Club helps develop the citizens who make Mercer Island the community that it is.

The value of the Club is captured by Peter Zajac, 2008 Youth of the Year: "The Boys & Girls Club has been a second home to me since I was 5. I attended preschool there in an open and loving environment where I found motivation and help. As I grew, the Club was a fun place to hang out and work on my passion, basketball. Here I developed the leadership skills that serve me today. Now, moving quickly through high school, the Club has enabled me to give back to our community. Keystone Club members and I have packaged toys for sick kids, planned a prom for the Starlight Star Bright organization, helped at retirement homes, chaperoned kids' dances, planned dodgeball tournaments, and raised money for AIDS and Malaria.

Through my experiences at the Club, I have realized the true power of people who are willing to work for things greater than money. Having positive older role models was the best thing in the world for me. The Club is filled with kids competing in sports, playing games and learning new material. I feel it is my responsibility to make an impact on these

kids' lives, and the Club gives me the opportunity to do so. It is important for our community to have a safe, fun environment where kids can interact freely. The Club has provided me with this desired atmosphere and helped me develop skills that I will use for the rest of my life."

The Club relies on donations for 30 percent of its operating budget and in tough times, fundraising is hard. But in tough times your help and donations are critical — to provide scholarships and meet operating costs. Requests for scholarships and financial aid have gone up dramatically. Donations also help maintain and operate our facility on West Mercer. This old building is expensive to maintain. Adding to all of this, the Club faced unexpected costs due to a recent break-in resulting in theft and vandalism.

When we call on March 2, 4 and 5, we need you to answer your phone and say, "Yes, I will give."

*Laurie Hornor and Peter Zajac are Boys & Girls Club Board Members. Zajac is the Boys & Girls Club 2008 Youth of the Year.*

Links referenced within this article

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