

Your strikes, spares will benefit 'Littles'

Loni Nannini Special To The Arizona Daily Star | Posted: Sunday, February 21, 2010 12:00 am



Waterfall Economidis Caldwell Hanshaw Villamana.

If you have a couple of hours to spare on March 5 or 6, supporters of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Tucson hope you will hit the lanes to help change the lives of local children at Bowl for Kids' Sake 2010.



Robert Villamana will be among the bowlers at the fundraiser, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary.

"There are so many single-parent families in town where one or more children do not have an appropriate role model for the missing parent, and the mentoring program provided by Big Brothers Big Sisters is a fabulous substitute for that missing ingredient," said Villamana, an attorney with

Every year he assembles three to five teams of colleagues, employees, clients and friends for the event.

"My clients are my friends ... and they look forward to it every year. Some show up just to cheer or have a beer with us. I want to stress how much fun everyone has.

"It is a terrific afternoon or evening of bowling and camaraderie," Villamana said.

The event is the organization's signature fundraiser, providing 20 percent of its annual operating budget.

It has been sponsored since inception by A.F. Sterling Homes. The company's president, Jon Fenton, said that as builders born and raised in Tucson, he and partner Peter Aronoff have seen the group's long-term impact on children in need of mentors, or "Bigs."

"I've been around it long enough to see kids go through the program with their Bigs and see how successful it is," he said.

Big Brothers Big Sisters served almost 900 children ages 6 to 17 last year. Right now, 118 "Littles" are awaiting matches with mentors.

The cost to support one match for a year is about \$1,000, including volunteer recruitment, screening and training, ongoing supervision by case managers, bi-monthly Big/Little activities and other support.

That individualized attention sets the organization apart and accounts for changes in the "Littles" that include improved grades; more confidence in school; less truancy and likelihood of illegal drug or alcohol use; interest in new activities; and more trusting, enhanced relationships with adults, family and peers, according to Program Director Megan Black.

"Every child matched with a Big Brother or Big Sister spends time one-on-one, so that time is just for the child," she said. "They don't have to worry about school or family or anything else that may be going on in their lives. ... All you have to do is show up when you say you will and be a friend to the child."

If You Go

- What: Bowl for Kids' Sake 2010.
- When: 4 to 9 p.m. March 5 and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. March 6. Teams will bowl in two-hour increments.
- Where: Bedroxx Family Fun Center, 4385 W. Ina Road.

You can support the event as a bowler, a sponsor or both. Donations of \$125 are requested from each bowler; form your own team of five by recruiting friends, relatives, co-workers or neighbors. You can also sponsor a bowler or make donations online to the team of your choice at www.tucsonbig.org/events .html or by calling 624-2447.

Prizes will be awarded for the best-dressed and the most creative team uniforms.

Bowlers who earn more than \$1,000 will be eligible for a drawing for a flat-screen television and University of Arizona basketball floor tickets.

The top fundraiser can choose among grand prizes including a Grand Canyon getaway, a flight in a private airplane and a Sports Enthusiast package including two tickets each for the 2010 Diamondbacks, Phoenix Suns and Arizona Cardinals seasons.

All proceeds benefit Big Brothers Big Sisters of Tucson.

Be a mentor

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Tucson is seeking mentors and is actively reaching out to the Hispanic and Native American communities for "Bigs" and "Littles."

Male mentors of any age and background are especially needed.

There are also opportunities for "Big Couples" who have been together for a year or longer to mentor a child as a team.

Mentoring opportunities are also available at elementary schools and after-school programs around the city.

For more information, go online to www.tucsonbig.org or call 624-2447.

Contact freelance writer Loni Nannini at ninch2@comcast.net