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FEATURED

Bowling event raises money, awareness for Big Brothers Big Sisters

By Jordan Gass-Poore' New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung
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Thomas Villa, left, helps his nephew Luke Conant, 4, as they bowl in support of Big Brothers, Big Sisters at Fiesta Lanes on Sunday during Bowl for Kids Sake. Villa's father and Luke's grandfather is a Big Brother in the program.

LAURA MCKENZIE | New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung

NEW BRAUNFELS — Clad in red glasses and matching Transformers T-shirt, 7-year-old New Braunfels resident Derek stood beside his Big Brother at Fiesta Lanes as his mentor helped him navigate the orange ball down the lane with no bumpers during Sunday's fifth annual Bowl for Kids' Sake.

Christian Tristan, a Texas State University senior, said it was the first time his Little Brother had bowled.

The duo were paired two months ago when Tristan applied for a volunteer position with Big Brothers Big Sisters. He said it was through his involvement with the Texas State Campus Crusade for Christ that he heard about the non-profit.

"I really related to children who faced adversity because I faced similar adversity," Tristan said. "I joined (Big Brothers Big Sisters) so they wouldn't have to face the same troubles or sorrows."

Tristan said he and Derek enjoy playing guitar and video games, as well as watching movies, searching for different area playgrounds and jumping on the trampoline.

"The trampoline at home has a net around it," Derek said.

Big Brothers Big Sisters representatives declined to give Derek's last name for privacy and security reasons.

Shannon Dixon, branch coordinator for Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Texas, said Derek was adopted by a single woman who lives in the area. She said his mother enrolled him in the organization because she wanted him to have a positive male role model.

All money raised from the Bowl for Kids' Sake event will help the organization match volunteers with a child in Comal and Guadalupe counties and provide for the 67 active matches, Dixon said.

As of publication, Dixon said Sunday's event raised \$5,000, surpassing last year's amount.

"Our program is invisible, but it's highly impactful," she said, dressed as the singer Cher, including a long, black wig for the event's rock 'n roll theme.

Bulverde resident Tom Villa said this was the first time he has attended Bowl for Kids' Sake. Villa said he met his first Little Brother Adrian as a St. Jude's Ranch volunteer in Bulverde.

St. Jude's Ranch is a residential facility for abused, abandoned and neglected children.

Two months into their mentorship, Villa said Adrian was adopted.

Villa remembered the skate ranch Adrian helped him build at St. Jude's, a project his new Little Brother Kaden, 11, continued until its completion.

The inspiration for the skate ranch came from Villa's experiences volunteering at St. Jude's and seeing how the children played video games, instead of participating in outdoor activities.

A friend of Villa's son donated six skateboards, helmets and pads to St. Jude's, he said. The equipment was given to those children who skated two hours a week for six weeks.

"You earn them, that's real life," he said.

Besides helping to build the skate ranch, Villa said he and Kaden spend time at rivers and climb rocks, as well as at his home with his three sons and four grandsons.

"My desire is to help him be a productive citizen," said Villa, adding that as a mentor he is there to complement Kaden's mother, not replace her as a parent, and to provide her with free time. "... (T)o balance fun with the serious."

Those interested in volunteering with Big Brothers Big Sisters must begin the enrollment process by completing an online application and submit a \$25 donation, or a comfortable amount, in support of the screening and training costs.

"When you think about in your lifetime there was always someone that made a difference to you," Dixon said. "You take those attributes and decide as children to bring them into adulthood. ...It's that desire to better something."

For information, visit www.bigmentor.org/index.php/comal.