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Champions of youth

CELEBRATING OUR KIDS'
MENTORS, ADVOCATES

Snow style

FASHION AND FUNCTION
COLLIDE THIS SKI SEASON

Staying in the game

FITNESS TIPS FOR ATHLETES
AND WEEKEND WARRIORS

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Champions of youth.

RENO MAGAZINE CELEBRATES THE PHILANTHROPISTS, ADVOCATES, AND VOLUNTEERS IN THE TRUCKEE MEADOWS WHO GIVE THEIR TIME, ENERGY, RESOURCES, HEARTS, AND SOULS TO OFFER OUR COMMUNITY'S KIDS A CHANCE TO SUCCEED. THE FOLLOWING PROFILES OF THESE GENEROUS INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, AND ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENT JUST A FEW OF THE THOUSANDS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO GIVE BACK EACH DAY, IN WAYS MODEST AND MONUMENTAL.

"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."

— Winston Churchill

PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

"What is important is that we each make a sincere effort to take our responsibility seriously for each other and for the natural environment we live in."

— The Dalai Lama, Nobel Lecture, December 1989

After more than 25 years in his role as mentor, award-winning educator, lifesaver, and more, Dave Zaski is known to thousands of school kids and their families in Washoe County simply as Fireman Dave. Hundreds more call him coach. Two call him dad. He picked up notions about the importance of helping kids by watching examples set by his father and grandfather.

Zaski began coaching Little League baseball when he was 18, and became involved in Big Brothers Big Sisters in college. Before becoming a professional firefighter for the North Tahoe Fire Protection District in the early 1980s, he was a volunteer fireman



↳ Landslide! Dave Zaski, also known as Fireman Dave, devotes thousands of hours to teach kids about fire prevention. Here, he slides down a ramp with Boys and Grills Club youth.

As follow-up to his presentations, Zaski also comes to the schools and has lunch with the kids, which he believes gives them a greater sense of being cared about. For more than 25 years, he has given thousands of volunteer hours, many professional hours, and countless financial donations to the cause.

His fun program about fire prevention and the consequences of playing with matches has grown into a serious team effort for Zaski and five colleagues, who now deliver it to thousands of school kids each year throughout the Tahoe region. As a Reno resident, Zaski also

adopted 10 Reno-area schools, where he spends his days off giving fire programs for free.

"Fireman Dave has inspired everyone I know, and he's always there for them," says McKenzie Salemme, a former Incline Village student who now is studying at Truckee Meadows Community College to become an EMT and full-time firefighter. "I've known

in Incline Village, which is where he started working with another mentor, Jerry Adams, who taught a kids' fire safety program with puppets. When Adams became fire marshal, Zaski volunteered to take over the reins, developing a lifesaving program for fire safety and prevention of his own.

"The kids started calling me Fireman Dave, and I guess it stuck," Zaski says.

"It changed my life **and my perspective,**" Tara Frooman says.

"We're brought up to be judgmental, with stereotypical stigmas about suicide and other problems in people's lives.

But as scary and ugly as these conditions are to us, people need our help."

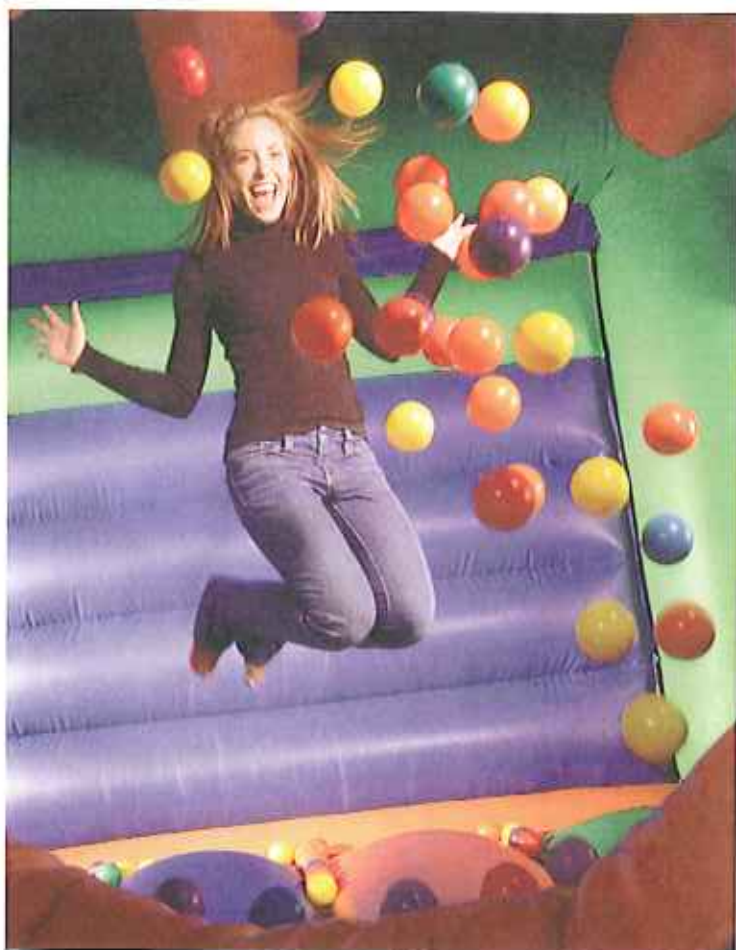
Fireman Dave from the time he came to my preschool all the way through high school. He's influenced my life and my friends' lives in so many ways. He presents material that's way beyond just fire safety; he talks about life lessons and peer pressure and making good decisions. My goal is to become a firefighter who gives back to the community; it all came from Fireman Dave."

As the needs and challenges have grown, so has the program. In a fire department budget of more than \$10 million, Zaski's North Tahoe program now is funded with \$20,000 annually, augmented by generous personal donations and volunteer hours.

"It's not much but we've learned that when one juvenile fire can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars in damage, a few thousand dollars can help prevent it," Zaski says.

Since keeping statistics in 1983, the department had 15 to 20 fires a year started by juveniles — which is a lot for a small community, he says. With education and intervention, the number dropped dramatically. In the late '90s, it went to zero. But then something happened.

"We began seeing an increase in juvenile fire starters in 2003-04, and began rethinking our approach," says Zaski, who helped develop the new Youth and Family Safety Program about a year ago as an all-risk intervention strategy. "We talk candidly about responsibilities these kids should have to their community and how violent behavior they see in video games and on TV should not be copied. We believe fire setting and getting in trouble in other areas can be related and we wanted to catch it early."



▲ Enjoying life! Tara Frooman, Miss Washoe County, volunteers at the Crisis Call Center to inspire and mentor youth teetering on the edge of self-destruction.

The court-supported program includes an intervention team of school counselors, detectives, firefighters, translators, and mental health professionals who meet with young juvenile offenders (whether or not fire setting was involved) and their families once a month for nine months. So far they've seen about 50 families, who learn parenting and study skills, anger management, goal-setting strategies, and other life-enhancing tools for success.

"It's been extremely rewarding, personally and professionally, to know we're making a profound difference in these kids' lives," Zaski says.

LIFE-CHANGING CHOICES

"Thou shalt not be a victim. Thou shalt not be a perpetrator. Above all, thou shalt not be a bystander."

— Holocaust Museum, Washington, D.C.

Another person who has seen the lifesaving and life-changing effects of her efforts is Hana Freeman, a University of Nevada, Reno freshman and current Miss Washoe County, who got an urgent call from her sister one day.

"She said her roommate was in the hospital after an overdose. The girl had tried to commit suicide," Freeman says. "Then my sister said, 'You've been through this; what should I do?'"

At first, Freeman was angry to be reminded of such a painful time in her own life.

"I was mad, upset, and put out that she would bring up this shameful thing in my past," Freeman says. "Then I realized if this girl could see where I've come since somebody found me and

[Cover]

could see there are still opportunities, I could take my bad experience to help her. Maybe I could help give somebody their life back, too. In that moment I knew that's what I needed to do."

Freeman called around to see how she could help and found a suicide hotline service and Dacla Gibson.

"I began working with her, going on outreach visits, and then became a certified crisis volunteer," says Freeman, who finished the 60-hour training program in the fall with the Crisis Call Center in Reno.

"It changed my life and my perspective," she says. "We're brought up to be judgmental, with stereotypical stigmas about suicide and other problems in people's lives. But as scary and ugly as these conditions are to us, people need our help. It can be your next-door neighbor or a close friend."

Freeman also credits her experiences with the local and state Miss America pageant organization for being the spark that focused her determination.

"When I began competing for the title of Miss Washoe County, they helped me see how important it is to use your talents and skills to help others," she says. "It was hard to talk publicly about my own suicide attempt, but now I share openly, hoping others might seek the help they need."

POINTS OF LIGHT

"One generation plants the trees; another gets the shade."
— Chinese proverb

Irene Dixon-Darnell and her team of committed cohorts also give the gift of intervention — and thousands of hours of their time — to help kids who may otherwise have fallen through the cracks. When Dixon-Darnell and her late husband, Bill Darnell, began tutoring elementary school kids through the Foster Grandparents program more than 15 years ago, they would regularly see kids come to school without homework done.

"These kids had no one to help them after school," Dixon-Darnell says. "No one to care."

So she and Darnell volunteered to help with the local school's Latch Key program where homework could come first, and the rest, she says, is history. During the scheduled play periods Darnell would bring in chess sets to teach the students about his favorite game. He taught 11 newcomers who wanted to know more.

"The kids were hooked," Dixon-Darnell says. "They couldn't wait to play. They'd get so excited because they were seeing they could master something. For some, it was the first time they felt they could really excel."

The strategy worked. Homework first, then chess as a reward.

As Dixon-Darnell and Darnell and their young chess players became known, the interest and the numbers grew. Darnell gave the program and his accomplished charges a formal title: Young Masters Chess Club. A substitute teacher, Ron Gentil, signed on to help; a YWCA administrator saw one of their demonstrations in a local park and invited the group to the Y for Friday night family sessions; Mayor Pete Sferazza played chess with the kids (and got beaten soundly) and more publicity came their way; and best of all, parents and teachers took note of how grades and study habits improved consistently.

Through grants at the YWCA and support from the Washoe County School District, the program was able to go into schools as a teaching tool, where Dixon-Darnell and Gentil could present chess to whole classes of kids.

"The teachers would see how kids would pay attention and were so enthused to learn," Dixon-Darnell says. "One teacher told another, the principals got on board, and then it spread."

Nevada Congresswoman Barbara Vucanovich also took note. And so did President George Bush, who named Dixon-Darnell one of his national Thousand Points of Light honorees.

"I got the call from Washington D.C. while I was at school one day," Dixon-Darnell says. "They said I'd been nominated by Mrs. Vucanovich. I was shocked."

Reaching out] Dave Zaski, who gives a hand to a Boys and Girls Club youth, enjoys making a difference in a child's life and helping the community in preventing man-made fires.



"These kids had no one **to help them after school,**" Irene Dixon-Darnell says.

"No one to care." So she and Bill volunteered to help with the local school's Latch Key program where homework could come first, and the rest, she says, is history.

Dixon-Darnell and Darnell traveled to the White House to accept the award.

Since that first session in Latch Key, the Young Masters Chess Program reached an estimated 15,000 school children in Washoe County during Dixon-Darnell's 12 years "on the job," until she retired a couple years ago.

"I guessed we reached about 1,500 kids a year. We would teach the chess program in 12 schools at a time, five classrooms each school, four days a week for 10 weeks," Dixon-Darnell says.

"Principals would beg to have us come to their schools; I'd have to tell them we could schedule them in a couple years or so, and they'd be fine with that."

No kidding. Of the 56 elementary schools in the district at the time, Dixon-Darnell and her team covered all but three. Sometimes they took the program back three or four times.

Now her remaining team, fellow Foster Grandparent Chris Christopherson and Gentil, carries on, taking the program to several schools a year. And Dixon-Darnell still runs into parents and kids she's taught in her program, including a junior national chess champion who started with her at 7 years old; he's in his 20s now.

"I saw his mother not long ago," Dixon-Darnell says. "She tells me he graduated from Harvard and is going to Columbia Law School. Chess has done wonders in his life."

And so has Dixon-Darnell.

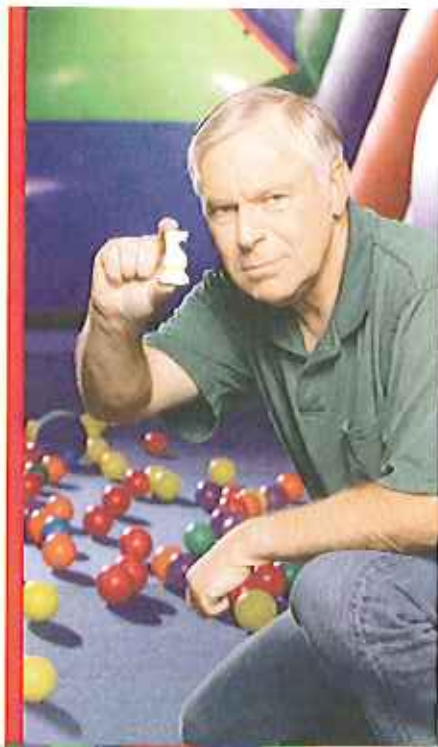
A FAMILY FULL OF COMPASSION

"We don't accomplish anything in this world alone ... and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of individual threads from one to another that creates something."

— Sandra Day O'Connor

The Reviglio family knows the value of togetherness and teamwork to get things accomplished. For more than 40 years, family patriarch Jack Reviglio, brother Tom, their wives, and now the next generation of sons and their wives — together with the Bill Higgins family — have built and run their successful business on the notion that customers, employees, and community come first.

Check mate! Ron Gentil, right, Chris Christopherson, below right, and Irene Dixon-Darnell, below, work on Project Chess — a program Dixon-Darnell and her late husband, Bill, developed 15 years ago. The after-school program includes helping youth with homework and then teaching them how to play chess as a reward.



[Cover]

"People have been so good to our family and great people helped us succeed," says Jack's son, Rick. "We believe when that happens, you give back. My dad and uncle have built a company culture that believes in giving to our community for the generosity it has shown us. We also have compassionate employees who take that philosophy into their neighborhoods. They serve on boards, coach youth teams, tutor at schools. It's a company culture we promote."

While they are reticent to be singled out for the generous work they do on behalf of disadvantaged youth in the Truckee Meadows, the Reviglios personally and through their business, Western Nevada Supply, give tirelessly of their time and resources to make sure that after-school time and weekends for kids in need are filled with activities for growth and enrichment.

As one example, thanks to the volunteer efforts of committed business owners and benefactors, including the Reviglio family and many others in Reno and Sparks, the nonprofit Boys and Girls Club of Truckee Meadows opened in 1976 and now operates at six sites, providing meals, athletics, tutoring, and activities to 700 kids a day. The main Don W. Reynolds Facility, which includes the Reviglio Teen Center, was recently expanded with a new, multi-million dollar, 80,000-square-foot sports and program complex.

This year alone — in one evening — the 25th Annual Jack T. Reviglio Cioppino Feed and Auction raised more than \$1

million, which goes directly to the organization for programs and services to kids.

"It is so rewarding to visit that facility any day after school and see hundreds of kids eating together in the cafeteria. You know for some that may be the only full meal of their day," says Rick, who credits the dynamic board of directors and an entire community that rallies to support the organization.

The senior Reviglios, Jack and Tom, know what it's like to be in need. Their father was killed when they were young and the sons went right to work, not able to participate in the normal fun and freedoms of youth.

"Because of their own experiences as kids, my dad and uncle have a soft spot for disadvantaged children who have to do without, who don't have families around them for support," Rick says. "They want to help those kids who don't have a chance."

The Reviglios' amazing legacy of generosity for others can be seen just about anywhere young people gather in Northern Nevada, from elementary school yards to the University of Nevada, Reno campus. The family and its company help build parks and facilities, donate in-kind services, building materials and supplies, athletic sponsorships, travel grants, computer and technology support, fund-raising expertise, in-kind improvements, and remodeling — all to enhance young people's lives.



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