INTERVIEW **BY LISA STAMOS • PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM PRISCHING**

Amy Wickstrom is a board member of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Dundee Township.

Future Forward Leadership Where It's Needed Most

BARRINGTON AREA LEADERS WORK TOGETHER TO BENEFIT THE BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS OF DUNDEE TOWNSHIP

Amy Wickstrom joined the Boys and Girls Clubs of Dundee Township (BGCDT) as a board member in 2016. She is serving as the Board Development Chairperson as well as on the Program Committee. She and husband Richard are chairing the upcoming '80s-themed "Tennies & Ties Gala" on November 6. We caught up with Amy to learn more about her passion for community service and how the Club serves area children.

Amy, thanks so much for spending time with us to talk about the Boys and Girls Clubs of Dundee Township. Please tell us why you are so passionate about this organization?

I think the biggest ways you can impact the trajectory of a child's life is by making sure they feel safe, cared-for, and supported. BGCDT does this so well by engaging with our kids and their families and meeting them where they need the most help right now, with meals, meaningful programming, and positive reinforcement. It's also important to ensure that they have the skills to be successful in life, and that's where the Impact Center does a great job of getting everyone ready to graduate and hit the ground running with a career pathway plan.

Why did you step up to be a part of BGCDT?

My friend, Wendy Farley, invited me to attend the Youth of the Year program in 2015. I was blown away by the impact the Club had on those teens' lives. At that time, BGCDT had started a site in D220 at Sunny Hill Elementary. I wanted to help grow the Club and support their mission of building character and inspiring potential for our club members.

The Club supports youth with outstanding programs in Barrington District 220, District 300, and District 158. Why is it so important to fill the gap for students between school and going home after school?

We serve over 2,000 children a year in partnership with School District 220 and 300 who live in Carpentersville, Dundee, Lake in the Hills, and Algonquin. Ninety-one percent of our kids live at or below the poverty line. This brings many challenges to their households, especially for hard-working parents who do not have the time to spend with their children on homework, games, art projects, or reading, or provide them with a healthy meal. Our organization meets this need in our communities by providing trained adult leaders to tutor and engage them in meaningful art and STEM activities, games, and sports. We also provide a healthy afternoon snack and dinner daily. We guide them in demonstrating positive behavior and making good decisions. Most importantly, we give them a place to belong, with supportive and caring adults who are committed to their success in life.

What are the Club's overall goals for youth?

Our program focuses on positive youth development goals for each program level. For elementary aged students, it's positive behavior support, character development focusing on self-confidence and determination, and the key academic subjects of reading and math. In middle school, it is positive identity, good decisions, healthy lifestyle, and an introduction to career opportunities. In high school, it's all about preparation for a successful launch at graduation, including career pathway planning, independent living skills including financial literacy, cooking and laundry, and 21st century workforce skills and experience.

What are some of the most important and exciting programs BGCDT offers?

Thanks to the generous support of the Barrington Area Community Foundation, we've been able to develop and scale a very meaningful elementary level STEM program that includes app design, digital photography, computer-aided design, and creating/making—focusing on foundational skills necessary for success in the 21st century workforce. We are also working with our school districts to implement and support a comprehensive reading and math remedial academic assessment and support program, targeted at addressing our kids' needs resulting from the pandemic. Our high school Impact Center recently launched its Career Pathway mentoring program, which helps members identify and support steps needed for success after graduation, including needed academic competencies, employability skills, and work experience including internships and summer jobs.

"Barrington 220 is so fortunate to have the volunteers and resources of The Boys and Girls Club of Dundee Township in our Sunny Hill Elementary School. Many parents at Sunny Hill are dual-working families and the Club provides valuable instruction and opportunities in their afterschool programming. The Boys and Girls Club's programs focus on building character, leadership, and educational and career development, which perfectly blends with D220's mission to inspire all learners to achieve excellence. On a personal note, the fundraising efforts of The Boys and Girls Club are extraordinary as well. I'm looking forward to some 'totally awesome' music and hairstyles at '80s Prom Night!" – ANGELA WILCOX, BARRINGTON 220 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

How do students connect with the Club?

At all program levels, we work with our school district partners to identify students in need of additional support and reach out to their families to make them aware of our program. We host family awareness events at our schools and in the community, and at the middle and high school level we actively recruit during the school day at the school sites. We also host community and family open houses.

Do teachers or school administrators in your three districts play an important role in connecting students to the Club?

Yes, they are vital in identifying students in need, creating awareness among parents, and promoting our Club in newsletters and communications to parents.

Who are some of your partner organizations and how do they help with your Club's goals?

We are thrilled to have many key partner organizations help enrich the lives of our members. Betsy Wintringer with Barrington Youth & Family Services has been so helpful with Social Emotional and Mentoring program consulting, supports, and resources. Kaleidoscope School of Fine Art provides art activities for our elementary and high school members. SmartFarm has provided plants during the height of the pandemic to support our virtual programs. First Tee, through the generosity and hard work of Matt McLaughlin, has provided opportunities for our kids to learn and play golf—a critically needed individual sport activity during the pandemic. Thanks to another meaningful investment from the Barrington Area Community Foundation, we partner with Friends of the Fox to get our kids outdoors on nature hikes, stream surveys, bug collections, and canoe trips. We are truly blessed to have so many caring and generous community partners.

There are so many Barrington area leaders who donate their time and talent to BGCDT. What do you believe is the draw for them in a community that has so many nonprofit leadership opportunities?

We believe the most important work in the world is investing in the life of a child, and we believe everyone feels the same. Our mission of creating better futures for children who need it the most is extraordinarily compelling and rewarding. I believe many of our community's leaders are deeply aligned on this mission, and our results reflect that their time and treasure invested in our kids makes a big difference.

Without BGCDT as a resource for youth, what is the outlook for their growth, and much-needed after school support?

I believe there is a strong possibility a child could be missing a key element for their success—someone who cares about them and believes in them. Our leaders are extraordinary in making our kids feel valued and appreciated, and they help them when and where they need it. Without our leader's concern and care, kids are emotionally vulnerable for validation elsewhere, including gangs, or can make destructive decisions about the value of school, choice of friends, or substance abuse. They also don't understand opportunities available to

them after graduation, and why academics and workplace skills are so important for economic success in our communities.

Do you have a favorite success story of a student whose life changed in a meaningful way through the Club?

Cami is a third-grader at Sunny Hill. She has three siblings, with a single hard-working mom who was laid off during the pandemic. Cami has a learning challenge, and at the time she came to our Club, was significantly behind in her schoolwork. Through a strong collaboration with Barrington 220, we ran a remedial academic summer program at Sunny Hill, and mom was beyond grateful that not only did Cami have a safe place she really liked to go, with two good meals a day, she was also able to catch up on her reading and math and begin the school year excited and prepared for success. This is the heart of what we do for our families.

What is your wish list of items or greatest support need right now?

We are mostly in need of financial support to continue to improve our curriculum, site supplies, staff trainings, and positive member experiences to help mitigate the pandemic's impact on their lives. We are grateful for the generous support from the Barrington community. For us to be effective, it takes the community to care. We are moved by how deeply Barrington invests in our children and cares about their futures. Please know that you are making a difference for those who need it most.

Please tell us about your upcoming gala! How can people attend?

After being virtual last year, we are thrilled to be hosting a really fun party on November, our '80s Prom Tennies and Ties Gala! We plan on having 400 attendees, with '80s-themed performances by our talented members, compelling silent and live auction items at our Starlight Mall, a video game contest in our Retro Arcade, and a great '80s band to dance the night away! So grab your Aquanet and Vans and join us for a fun night for a great cause. **Tickets are available at bgcdt.org/80sprom.**

Barrington Area Leaders Serving BGCDT

- Wendy Farley is currently serving as Board President and was formerly a D220 School Board member.
- Karen Trzaska is serving as the Government Relations Committee Chair. She is also involved with Barrington Area Conservation Trust.
- Will McCoy is the Program Committee Chair.
- Tom Roeser is the Board Vice President.
- Michelle Maison is BCGDT's Director of Development.
- Kaleidoscope Art School provides arts programs on a regular basis at BGCDT's Impact Center.
- Kelly Berkowitz is a dedicated volunteer at Sunny Hill Elementary School.
- Barrington Junior Women's Club members came once a week to Sunny Hill School pre-COVID.
- Barrington Youth & Family Services is a partner of Boys & Girls Clubs of Dundee Township assisting members and their families with mental wellness.

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