

# Park foundation set for Day of Giving

## Fox Valley group seeks money for programs for kids, veterans

BY STEVE LORD

Learning and well-being are the order of the day at the Fox Valley Park District during the upcoming Day of Giving on Dec. 3.

Those things, and more, are what come of the three programs for kids and veterans targeted by the Fox Valley Park Foundation, a separate nonprofit organization that serves residents of the Fox Valley Park District.

This is the third year the foundation has participated in the Day of Giving, a nationwide effort to raise money for nonprofits that takes place on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving. Many nonprofits participate – the Aurora-based Dunham Fund has more than 60 organizations involved.

The park foundation uses the day to target three of its programs. The goal is to raise \$10,000 to send 50 kids to camp, teach 50 kids to swim and help 20 disabled veterans improve their physical well-being by buying them a year's membership to the Vaughan Athletic Center on Aurora's West Side.

Giving Tuesday runs for a 24-hour period, and is focused on online donations. During that time, people can donate on the Fox Valley Park Foundation's website and Facebook page.

In the last two years the foundation has awarded more than \$100,000 in grants toward a variety of community needs, and recently the foundation's board of directors approved grant requests to nine Park

District-sponsored programs and events, totaling \$52,000, for use in 2020.

These funds came through the foundation's largest event, the annual Golf for Kids fundraiser, which celebrated its 25th year in June at Orchard Valley Golf Course.

"The real value comes in the participation by students, families and veterans who find a program of value tailored to them, at an affordable price and available in a location accessible to them," said LuAnne Kelsey, the foundation's chairwoman. "When we speak of under-served residents, all these factors – and more – come into play with social equity. All residents deserve an opportunity to participate at some level."

The programs and the grant funds each will receive in 2020 are:

Heroes in Health, \$1,500, which provides veterans a

way of transitioning back to their community and engaging with other former service members through fitness. The program is also targeted on the Day of Giving.

Mindfulness and Meditation, \$2,500, which provides cancer survivors and those diagnosed with the disease a holistic option to healing, which includes using yoga to clear toxins from treatment, reducing stress and anxiety, and providing a gentle exercise option.

Pop-Up Programs in the Park, \$3,020, which provides safe and new activities that help keep kids active and learning something new while having fun with friends and peers.

Jesse "The Law" Torres Boxing Club Program, \$5,000, which provides the boxing club with an updated facility to train as members participate in the program, which promotes

physical fitness through boxing and gives kids and teens a safe outlet from gangs or drugs, and by keeping them off the streets.

Move to Learn, \$5,100, based on the "Motion Evolution" concept, which provides classes for children through age 7 and includes the educational basics (numbers, letters, colors and shapes), physical gross motor basics (running, jumping, climbing, rolling, swinging, hanging and balance), and sensory stimulation (sight, sound, texture and physical movement).

The Aurora Housing Authority Summer Camp, \$5,380, which includes activities at three public-housing complexes, targeting high-risk youth and teens, ranging from group games, arts and crafts, nature walks and walking field trips, along with a specific sport or activity each week.

Preschool Program for

4's, \$7,000, which offers 4-year-olds in the Creative/Nature Play Preschool program two days of activities a week at the Prisco Community Center - 10 students will be fully funded by the grant money.

Sports Saturday Program, \$10,000, which is a free, 11-week program offered to community members in West Aurora School District 129 and East Aurora School District 131, providing ways for children to remain active in the winter months when outdoor activities may be limited due to the weather.

Summer Playgrounds Camp, \$12,500, which are camps offered at four parks throughout the district for six weeks during the summer, when children 6 to 11 years old participate in arts and crafts, group games, sports and Friday field trips.

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# Sounds of Good News celebrates 40 years

## Support group combines music, ministry, service

BY DAVID SHAROS

The Prisco Center was alive Saturday afternoon with the sounds of good music and good news as a local inspirational and support group for kids, parents and caregivers celebrated its 40th anniversary.

Sounds of Good News – a group founded by Rockford resident Carl Cole, 58, who is both a musician and ordained minister – brought the party to its Aurora satellite location for a two-hour celebration beginning at noon Saturday.

The celebration included both music and food and also served as a tribute to the suburban Chicago branch President Frank Robinson, who started the local branch of SOGN here in 2005.

Robinson, 69, spoke about how quickly time has passed since he and Cole became lifelong friends decades ago.

"You find yourself doing a lot of the same things day in and day out, and you look up and 40 years have gone by," Robinson said as musicians began warming up. "I talk to young people about what they want to do, and I always tell them, 'Don't stop' – things aren't going to happen in a week, and things take time."

"You're going to have to endure some things and there will be setbacks, but when you're done with it, you'll know you have made a mark."

Dan Leahy, director of marketing and communications for the Fox Valley Park District, said "we are honored to have this organization use our facility at the Prisco Center, which is the hub for the arts, for their milestone."

"This group is very aligned with what we do – whether it's guitar playing or singing or getting a free sports lesson – which is to



DAVID SHAROS/BEACON-NEWS PHOTOS

Carl Cole, of Rockford, plays keyboards as his wife, Dianna, and friend Frank Robinson sing during a 40th anniversary celebration for of the Sounds of Good News organization that has operated a branch Aurora since 2005. A two-hour party was held at the Prisco Center on Saturday.

help kids find their passion and give them a path forward," Leahy added. "The more people and groups there are to lead them, the better we all are."

Visitors casually strolled into the meeting room, where boxes of pizza and drinks were set up, and listened to the music played by Cole and his fellow musicians.

During a break, Cole said the SOGN organization was actually founded on the same day as Saturday's celebration.

"It was Nov. 23, 1979, and we're excited that Frank (Robinson) is part of this today, as we first started working at Northern Illinois University, and Aurora was one of our main spots," Cole said. "We had an open

house for our Aurora group here in 2005, and this is sort of a coming home. Today is special because here is where (the Aurora branch) all started."

Family members spoke about their experiences with the group, including Cole's wife Dianna Cole, who said the journey with her husband "has been quite a ride" and that there "has never been a dull moment."

"Being married to Carl has enhanced my life," she said. "My dad was a pastor, and we all sang when I was growing up and had a love of music. The reward of doing this – aside from the music – is seeing kids head in the right direction and make good and better choices and develop great character."

Robinson's sister, Rose



Cole is all smiles Saturday at the Prisco Center in Aurora.

Robinson-Horton, who also lives in Aurora, said her brother "has always been a musical person" and played drums before eventually teaching himself keyboards.

"My mother played the piano, and I tried but

couldn't," she said. "My brother was always a singer and would really stand out. I've loved this organization and traveled at times with some of the kids and watched them grow musically and how they would

carry themselves. We do demand they show respect for others."

Aurora Ald. Edward Bugg of the 9th ward came to represent the city and said the group "that originated out of Rockford and Freeport does good work."

"I've met Frank Robinson and his vision is the same as that of Aurora – we're always focused on kids end enriching them as much as we can," he said. "The message of music and ministry and community service fits right in with our vision of Aurora. Their work in schools through projects and assemblies is meeting a need."

David Sharos is a freelance reporter for The Beacon-News.

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