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## Time to Play Community Investors, Inc. Launches the Sports Club for Today's Adolescents

PATTY LENZ BOVIE **writer**

*from the day* most kids are born, they get swept up into a whirlwind of organized activities—from one-hour “mommy-and-me yoga” to family music classes. As soon as they can walk they are shuffled from ice hockey to soccer and back. And throughout elementary school their activities double in duration and frequency. But in middle school the dynamics change.

Sports teams become more competitive and students need to find a place for themselves. Wellesley Middle School (WMS) offers a range of after-school activities—from structured programs such as floor hockey, soccer, team handball, and dance classes, to unstructured “open gym” time for pick-up basketball, ping-pong, and badminton, as well as use of the Fitness

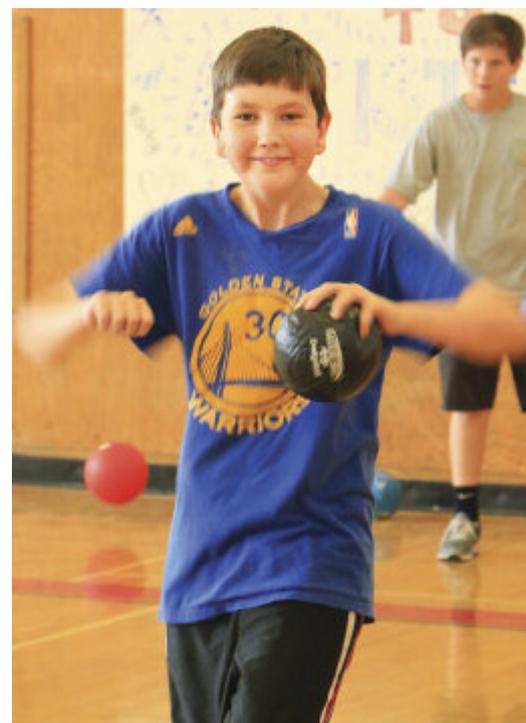
Center. And there are a variety of clubs based on student interests. But there is always room for more opportunities to engage in after-school play and socialization.

In 2014, Wellesley resident, Joe Roberts, channeled his experience running summer and vacation sports camps into Community Investors, a new nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting Wellesley's adolescents with after-school, noncompetitive sports programs. Community Investors launched its first pilot program—the Sports Club—last fall in partnership with Wellesley Middle School. “As a parent with kids in the Wellesley public school system, I thought it would be beneficial to introduce programs combining active play and socialization to complement WMS' after-school offerings,” explains Roberts.



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fitness & health “a chance to expend some energy in a productive manner”



PHOTOS BY DARREN BOVIE

Chris Cavallerano, Wellesley resident and Roberts’ philanthropy advisor, is equally passionate about the Sports Club. “For adolescents, the time immediately after-school is vital for being active and socializing. Community Investors strives to create programs for kids that give them additional supportive experiences.” Based on the success of the pilot, the Wellesley School Department and Community Investors are continuing to discuss additional opportunities to partner.

Another need that Community Investors is trying to address is the loss of recess in middle school. Elementary students typically have both morning and afternoon recess, where kids can get outside, run around and have fun. But in Wellesley, as in most school districts, that goes away in middle school.

“Kids get out of school at 2:30 p.m. and the Sports Club gives them a positive outlet to disconnect from technology, have fun, blow off steam, socialize in person and get some fresh air,” says Cavallerano. “If kids have nothing to do, they sometimes get mixed up in things that are not so healthy.” Wellesley Police Chief, Terry Cunningham, is an advocate for programs like this. “The Sports Club appeals to a broad

“I am so grateful for the opportunity you’ve given to my child! He is new to the school and this gives him a chance to **PLAY** and meet new kids. I love the fact that the **Sports Club** is a chance for **ALL** kids to play sports, not just the ‘best’ athletes.”

spectrum of youth in our community,” he says. “Really good things happen when you give kids a chance to expend some energy in a productive manner, especially for the disenfranchised kids on the fringe.”

The Sports Club also gives Wellesley High School students an opportunity to participate through its Coaching & Leadership Development Program. “Those teen years can be tough,” says Roberts. “Our program gives them valuable experience as mentors and helps them develop leadership skills. It also empowers kids by giving them

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an opportunity to earn their own money, which we consider another benefit of our program.”

As parents of three children each, both Roberts and Cavallerano agree that kids today have more academic and athletic pressure than ever before. And too much technology isn’t a healthy outlet. “It’s fostering inactivity in our kids and making them cognitively and emotionally deficient with the guise of making them seem connected,” explains Cavallerano. Roberts agrees. “Community Investors was created to take on these problems, one kid at a time. We support our kids with activities that holistically strengthen them, both mentally and physically, during an otherwise challenging time in their life. It’s like the sandlot with guardrails.”

All Middle School students are welcome to participate in the Sports Club. “Even if kids don’t have interest in the athletics, there’s always a place for them here,” explains Cavallerano. There are student DJ, announcer and social media correspondent positions available. The program includes less-traditional sports like flag football and dodgeball (with foam balls) to encourage inclusion. Loud, upbeat music

enhances the fun factor. And to avoid the dreaded feeling of being picked last, teams are pre-assigned and balanced. Just like the kids would do themselves.

Last year, more than 70 students participated in the Sports Club’s coed flag football league, and another 30 in coed soccer. While only 10 percent of participants were girls, Roberts and Cavallerano are hoping to change that.

Community Investors works with Wellesley Public Schools’ faculty, administration, and parents, along with local businesses. Wellesley Public Schools’ Superintendent David Lussier sees the potential of the program: “We are always looking for new ways to expand opportunities for our students with as many experiences as possible, and we think that by partnering with Community Investors we may be able to offer an additional after-school athletic outlet for our students.” Adds Wellesley Middle School Principal, Mark Ito, “While we offer multiple opportunities for student athletic activity after school, we are happy to explore expanding those offerings as a collaborative community partner. Social play can reinforce the values of camaraderie, collaboration, perseverance, and participation.”

Another mission of Community Investors is to lead and support initiatives to expand and improve recreational resources. “Wellesley has a critical shortage in both playing fields and indoor recreational facilities,” says Roberts.

As part of a cross-community effort to raise funds for a new Track and Field project at Wellesley High School, Community Investors is serving as fiscal agent for the private capital campaign. “This project

“My son absolutely loves it. We are thrilled as it provides exercise, time with friends, and time away from video games. We consider the Sports Club just as important for his all-around growth as his academic studies.”



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fitness & health “the importance and value of community”

will substantially increase opportunities and utilization,” Roberts continues. “We are proud to be a part of a great team effort and look forward to supporting additional opportunities to expand our community resources.”

As a nonprofit, Community Investors is supported by local businesses and private donors. John Pastore, Senior Vice President of Integrated Financial Partners, was a founding donor, “My son and many of his friends in Wellesley have enjoyed Joe’s Terriers baseball programs for years. Our

firm has also collaborated with Joe in the financial services field and know he is capable of great things. We saw this as a unique opportunity to fund a proven leader to launch an impactful program for our community. We are proud to support Community Investors.”

Roberts sees yet another benefit of Community Investors. “Over the years we’ve been fortunate to see graduates of our other programs go on to do great things including becoming a Major League Baseball player, a college varsity football coach, and two NFL assistant coaches. But the graduate we are most proud of founded his own nonprofit to support Wellesley students in need, and is now on the Community Investors’ Board helping us get started,” recalls Roberts. “So while the kids may view our program simply as a great way to have fun, we are working to teach them the importance and value of community and hope they will be inspired to support their town someday. Every city and town could benefit from a program like this. And we believe we can create a blueprint that can be replicated for many other communities.” [WV](#)

