

Huge lift from Big Brothers

Kevin Meehan credits program with turning his life around

BY KARYL MICHAUD
FOR THE SUN CHRONICLE

ATTLEBORO

If you wonder what difference the Big Brothers, Big Sisters program can make in the life of a child, consider the case of Kevin Meehan.

Meehan, of Attleboro, has gone from, by his own admission, an "uninspired fifth-grader" to a student at George Washington University, majoring in economics.

Late last month, he was named one of the first 13 recipients of the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Massachusetts Bay Scholarship, a needs-



Kevin Meehan

based program designed to bridge the gap between what schools offer in financial aid and what it actually costs to attend them. A total of \$50,000 was awarded.

Meehan entered the Big Brothers, Big Sisters program when he was in the fifth grade. Then a resident of Millis, he was matched with Big Brother Nathan Berkowitz, who would pick him up a couple days a week after school.

"I was in a position where I didn't really care about academics, but it (Big Brothers, Big Sisters) really turned me around. I started to work really hard," said Meehan.

Berkowitz, who owns his own commercial real estate company, and Meehan went to the movies, cut wood, and went on bicycle rides together. Berkowitz took Meehan in an elevator for the first time, taught him how to walk a dog, run a tractor, and took him to Red Sox games.

With the help of his Big Brother, he was accepted to the Eaglebrook

School, an all-boys boarding school, then went on to attend Deerfield Academy, a co-ed boarding school, in high school through a full scholarship from an anonymous Big Brother. At Deerfield Academy, Meehan played football and Berkowitz would come to cheer him on.

At George Washington, Meehan is a member of the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity, holds a job as a referee, and has an unpaid internship with a real estate company.

"I'm very proud of the relationship," Berkowitz said. "He's a smart kid, a sponge for knowledge, and listens more than he speaks."

"Knowing I made a difference in a kid's life, gave Kevin another person to talk to, and the opportunity to go to college, I get tears in my eyes when I think about it."

After graduation, Meehan plans to become an investment banker or go into real estate. He said he is working on starting a company with his roommate from high school.

Once a student turns 18, he is considered to be "aged out," and is no longer eligible for a Big Brother. But Berkowitz and Meehan still talk to each other every week.

John Pearson, CEO of Big Brothers, Big Sisters, is hoping the new scholarship program, funded entirely by donations, will double in the next year. His vision is to make it open-ended so that all applicants may receive aid. Pearson said they also want to renew scholarships for more than a year if the applicants remain qualified. Pearson also stressed that there is a great need for Big Brothers and Big Sisters, as there is a waiting list of hundreds of children, including the Attleboro area.

"You start out with things like basketball; building a relationship with a child. Out of that activity, you can start to build morales," said Pearson.

Volunteers usually spend a few hours a couple of times a month with their Little Brother or Sister. Most are 25 to 35 years old, but the age of the volunteer does not matter.

"Be open-minded, be patient, listen twice as much as you speak, be creative, energetic. If you're willing to give some time, then the other stuff will happen," advised Berkowitz.

TO VOLUNTEER to be a Big Brother or a Big Sister, call 1-888-412-BIGS or visit www.bigbrothersbigsisters.com.