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Shining Stars

Stepping out for Mentoring



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By John Howell

Turn back the clock more than 11 years and Arlene McNulty, then president of the Rhode Island Mentoring Partnership, was looking for a signature event that set mentoring apart from other non-profits and at the same time spotlight mentoring.

Intrigued by the popular television show "Dancing with the Stars," she envisioned an event where professional dancers would mentor community celebrities in a fundraising event. Co-worker Joanne Schofield added a twist that in addition to judges selecting the most entertaining and technically accomplished dancers there be a "people's choice" selected on the basis of the total donations raised by that pair of dancers.

They had a winner.

In 11 years Dancing with the Stars of Mentoring has raised more than \$750,000 to help run the program that through its direct services matches 400 volunteer mentors with 400 students in Warwick, Cranston, Woonsocket, Newport, Middletown and Pawtucket. In addition, the network that has taken on the new name of Mentor Rhode Island serves as a focal point and resource for other mentoring programs linking 4,000 mentors statewide with 5,000 youths. The event is a huge commitment.

Dancing Feeling has been a key partner from the start, with many of the same professional dancers performing all of those years. Over the last four months Schofield has watched the evolution with the neophytes transforming with each practice session. There is also a partnership with the corporate community. The list is extensive with WJAR Channel 10, Cardis, Met Life Auto and Home, Textron, Pawtucket Credit Union, Centreville Bank, Amica, Amgen, Coastway Community Bank, Citizens Bank, Koch Eye Associates and Washington Trust Bank just a few of many over the years. Financial support is part of it. This year, Coastway set up and managed the silent auction. Washington Trust took on the sale of 150 bottles of wine at \$40 each. Each bottle was accompanied by a gift certificate – also a donation from a local business – with a value of \$25 to \$50.

Between staff and volunteers, more than 50 people pulled off the evening, and that's not counting the dancers.

"It is an amazing collaboration of individuals and companies coming together to support kids that really need our help," said Schofield.

Dancing with the Stars of Mentoring has also enabled the agency to be creative and step beyond its comfort zone just as first time dancers do when they sign on to become a dancing star. Much of mentoring funding is tied to grants and service performed. Funds raised in dancing are not.

"By giving us that much-needed unrestricted income, we could truly become the creative innovators we're meant to be in the mentoring movement," said Schofield.

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March 30 - May 13 | The Foursome, Newport Playhouse, 102 Connell Highway, Newport, RI (/stories/the-foursome,122415)

Tomorrow | The Dancing Feeling Casual Ballroom Dance, The Dancing Feeling, 2429 Post Road, Warwick, Rhode Island (RI) (/stories/the-dancing-feeling-casual-ballroom-dance,123855)

Saturday | Downton Abbey Tea at Hearthside, Hearthside House Museum, 677 Great Road, Lincoln, RI (/stories/downton-abbey-tea-at-hearthside,124158)

Saturday | Eco-Depot/Dehumidifier Turn-In event, Rhode Island Resource Recovery, 65 Shun Pike, Johnston, Rhode Island (/stories/eco-depotdehumidifier-turn-in-event,124036)

Saturday | EG Rumble, East Greenwich High School, 300 Avenger Drive, East Greenwich, RI (/stories/eg-rumble,123608)

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