



Respect 90® Foundation Volunteer Spotlight

Says Joe Maddon: "The volunteers are the unsung heroes. Without them, none of our efforts occur."

Every month, the Respect 90 Foundation will salute a distinguished volunteer from the communities of Tampa, FL, Chicago, IL, Mesa, AZ, Southern California or Joe's hometown of Hazleton, Pennsylvania.

Respect 90 will also present a \$1,000 grant to that volunteer's charity.



Dr. Dawn Miller | Boys & Girls Clubs
of Garden Grove (CA)

The village of Menomonee Falls is the kind of place where people care about their neighbors. Its entire population doesn't come close to filling Miller Park, home of the Milwaukee Brewers the major league team that plays about 20 miles away.

It's where Dawn Miller (no relation) grew up. Much of her upbringing came in the 70's, a decade Tom Wolfe coined the "Me Decade."

It would appear the acclaimed author never visited Menomonee Falls.

"My mom stressed to my sister, brother and me the importance of giving back to others at an early age," says Dawn. Her mother, Anna, an dedicated educator and a devoted volunteer who nurtured Down Syndrome kids, who would go on to become a pioneer in educating special needs students.

"I think volunteering started with Girl Scouts, Brownies in second grade, and of course, my mom was the troop leader," she recalls. "My dad played the ukulele and banjo so either with the Girl Scouts or just our family we would go to nursing homes and lead singalongs with the residents, especially around Christmas."

There were also swimming lessons provided and summer camps held in the family's backyard for special needs youngsters.

Dawn never forgot any of it.

Some forty years later and nothing has changed. Except now she is in Garden Grove, California no doubt making her mother proud.

For the past 20 years, Dawn has served as the Special Children's Day coordinator for the Garden Grove Strawberry Festival in Orange County. In that role, she oversees the festival's exclusive day for mentally and physically challenged students. In 2019, more than 2000 students took home a stuffed animal and experienced the thrill of carnival rides, enjoying hot dogs, funnel cakes, ice cream and games.

And that's just for fun.

At the core of her commitment to serve is her current 36-year run in a leadership role for the Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove. All while building a renowned optometry practice that propelled her to be named the 2016 California Optometrist of the Year.

Mark Surmanian, CEO Boys & Girls Clubs of Garden Grove says it best: "We have been very fortunate to have many great volunteers over the past 60 years, but a precious few have demonstrated the long-term commitment to our kids, families, and community the way Dr. Miller has. For almost four decades, she has played an integral part through all the major transitions our organization has experienced and had a vital hand in both the local and national advancement of our mission. Her dedication, support and leadership as a board leader, community volunteer, mentor, and donor has never wavered and the kids and families of Garden Grove are blessed by the benefits of her service."

Dawn takes it in stride. "My husband says I am a serial volunteer," she says with a chuckle. "I guess I don't sleep much."

After getting her undergraduate degree at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Dawn headed west where she graduated Summa Cum Laude from the Southern California College of Optometry.

It didn't take long for her to get involved tackling the early issue of "latch key" kids – students being left alone after school- by promoting community partnerships, a hallmark of her leadership.

One of those early alliances came with the Garden Grove School District where BGCGG opened its first school site in 1988. Today, BCCGG serves 5,000 children a day from the communities of Garden Grove, Westminster, Santa Ana, Anaheim, Fountain Valley, and Stanton. Dawn represents those communities and much of Southern California as a member of the National Area Council.

Other key partnerships ensued including the Garden Grove Unified School District, Orange County Department of Education, California Department of Education Cal SAC, OC STEM, California Afterschool Network, other local Boys & Girls Clubs, and Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

When Dawn began with BGCGG, the clubs operated separately. In 1989, while serving her first term as Board President this visionary leader already recognized the importance of creating unity among all community clubs. She was involved in talks with Boys Clubs of America about how to serve both boys and girls under one roof and one name. It was met with resistance locally, but Dawn crossed picket lines of kids, parents and community members, and became a strong advocate to ensure that the Girls Club of Garden Grove merged with the local Boys Club of Garden Grove -becoming Boys & Girls Clubs of Garden Grove.

In 1990, the clubs officially merged on a national level.

"Safety of the children was a major concern, providing a consistent, safe after school environment" says Dawn." The Girls Clubs had already adopted needed safety measures. The staff at their centers knew who was in the building and who wasn't at all times."

In her second term as President in 2005, she recognized a unique opportunity to address the needs of the whole child. This realization led to her participation in a coalition that formed a children's health center composed of multiple partners working together under one roof. The BGCGG's ARCHES program was born. It is a dedicated family support program that focuses on improving families' **A**ccess to **R**esources for **C**hildren's **H**ealth, **E**ducation, and **S**upport. ARCHES connects families to community resources by providing among other things extensive targeted case management services, community service linkages, community outreach, health insurance enrollment, emergency food services, parent education and pediatric vision care.

Dawn personally solidified a partnership with Marshall B. Ketchum University's College of Optometry to provide a doctor for the vision clinic. As a result, thousands of children have received no/low cost eye exams and free prescription glasses.

Dawn has two children of her own, Jard and Jace, both of whom attended BGCGG during their school age years and her husband, Ray Schuler, currently serves on the board of directors for B&GC of South Puget Sound.

And her mother, Anna? She's 84 years old and still serving the community as a bridge between seniors and the Menomonee library. And yes, she still lives in the same house where she delivered those inspirational messages to her family.

– Rick Vaughn | Executive Director, Respect 90 Foundation



For more information on the Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove go to bgcgg.org