

Looking Back

Prized benefactors mark more than a decade of giving and receiving

During this season of giving, I want to reflect on the generosity of the Barrington community that supports our schools while telling a little story from my childhood where the act of giving went awry. ¶ Growing up, my little brother, Bob, loved animals. Initially he was drawn to cats, then dogs, then hamsters. At a certain point, his attention turned to reptiles. He would catch turtles in the nearby creek, bring them home and form small colonies in a makeshift pool. My mom tolerated his passion and our little “zoo” seemed to always have some new variety of critter. Noah would have been proud of Bob.

ONE SPRING, SEVERAL BLOCKS FROM our house, an exotic pet shop opened. Animal World at Milwaukee and Harlem beckoned to my brother. Not only did the store sell the basic dogs, cats, tropical fish and hamsters, but it also had alligators, large lizards, snakes and wild mammals of all sorts. Bobby fell in love with a juvenile 5-foot-long boa constrictor. These large snakes can grow to be as long as 14 feet in the wilds of Central and South America, where they hunt by wrapping around their prey and constricting the victim to death before consuming it whole. To my brother, it was just a peaceful loving pet with pretty eyes.

The challenge for Bob was to get my mom to accept this predator into our house. My brother and I earned a meager allowance each week for doing specific household tasks, and our parents allowed us the discretion to spend that money. My 8-year-old brother saved his money and formed a fool-proof plan. He bought the snake, brought it home and presented it as a present for my mom. He thought, “How could any mother not accept a gift from her youngest son?” As the snake wrapped itself around my brother’s arms and neck, what Bobby perceived as an affectionate hug my mom assessed as a serpent selecting its prey. Needless to say, my mom’s reaction was not positive.

Public school systems are constantly being squeezed. But unlike Mom’s aversion to her “gift,”

generosity toward our school district is always enthusiastically received.

In the past decade, countless gifts from Parent Teacher Organizations, the District 220 Educational Foundation, booster clubs and individual community members have supported our schools in ways both wise and kind. The PTOs, booster clubs and the District 220 Foundation work closely with administrators and teachers to determine areas where they can supplement and enrich so many educational and co-curricular programs. Since 2000, the Educational Foundation, PTOs and booster clubs have collectively averaged more than \$1 million in gifts each year, providing much-needed technology and instructional enhancements for students.

As you visit our schools, many of the investments made by these groups are noticeable, such as interactive SMART Boards, multimedia equipment for the BHS TV studio, classroom Sound Fields for hearing impaired students and those in the primary grades, athletic facilities, and playgrounds at many elementary schools (including the new Early Learning Center). Less visible but equally significant support is given to professional development for teachers, staff appreciation activities, school spirit programs, drug and alcohol awareness events for students, and our new science and literacy curricula.



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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By the way, you may wonder what ever happened to my brother’s slithering pet. Well, the same day my mom received the “gift,” she explained firmly to my brother that the snake must be returned to the store. When Mom arrived at Animal World with the snake and my teary-eyed brother in tow, the store manager pointed to the sign above the counter stating “Absolutely No Returns/Refunds.” Mom gave the man her best “first-grade-teacher/mother death stare” and told him that anyone who would sell a deadly snake to an 8-year-old better not mess with her. He wisely refunded Bob’s money, quietly collected the snake and gave my brother a free cuddly guinea pig. Moral of the story: While it is better to give than to receive, never think you can fool your mother.

And to so many residents and taxpayers, generous individuals and organizations, thank you for the gifts you graciously provide to Barrington 220. Your support of our students is critical to maintaining a world-class school system. This community, as reflected in how it supports the needs of children, takes the charitable spirit of the holiday season and extends it throughout the whole year. U