

BRUNELLE HONORED

By Aaron Curtis

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LOWELL » Angel Brunelle strolled seamlessly among dozens of exuberant teens inside the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell recently, showing off the spaces that serve around 300 kids daily.

Brunelle — the club’s director of development since August 2015 — used words like “hopeful,” “open” and “resilient” to describe the kids that buzz around her.

She characterized working for a place like the Boys & Girls Club as “dreamy.”

“I’m amazed at what our team does with the young people,” Brunelle said. “We’re not just warehousing them. There are really engaging programs with a real purpose to help our kids become successful adults. That is something that is special to be a part of.”

At age 22, and a year re-

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Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell Director of Development Angel Brunelle, recent recipient of an award from the MA Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs, in the Makerspace, one of the spaces improved with funding she obtained. Girls, from left, Jazmin Colon, 9, Christina In, 8, Noelle

Averhart, 9, and Shantell Santana Espiritusanto, 8, all of Lowell, were making snowflakes with a punch, to decorate a box for letters to Santa.

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moved from graduating from Miami University in Ohio — her home state — Brunelle headed east to accept a YMCA camp counselor position in Connecticut. The move turned out to be a career- defining moment for Brunelle.

“ I discovered that I love working with young people,” she said. “And to my surprise, was good at it.”

Since that first job in youth development, Brunelle has only worked for youth- serving nonprofits. It’s a career spanning 25 years, and one that led to her current position in Lowell.

“ I loved the idea of being able to work with youth while serving an organization in my own communi-ty,” said Brunelle, a Lowell resident for the last decade.

While showing off the club, Brunelle walked through what used to be the teen room — now an expanded teen lounge. She then headed for the adjoining Career and College Readiness and Teen Robotics rooms.

These additions to the club — along with a newly refurbished fitness space and the Makerspace — have expanded the ability to entertain and enlighten teens when their school day ends. Joe Hungler, the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell executive director, stressed it’s Brunelle’s efforts that played a key roll in the club’s growth.

Brunelle is responsible for planning, directing and coordinating all development activities, major fundraising activities, marketing and special projects, “while supporting the organization’s mission,” Hungler said.

That mission, according to the club’s website is “ To inspire and enable young people, especially those who need us most, to realize their full potential as productive, responsible and caring citizens.”

According to Hungler, Brunelle’s fundraising efforts are responsible for 94% of the club’s budget, which includes major gifts, annual campaigns, grants from foundations and the government as well as special events.

“ Facing a rapidly increasing budget due to a growing need, new programs and higher staff costs, Angel found creative ways to increase our budget,” Hungler said.

The club's special event strategy included moving to mobile bidding and sponsorship bundling for their golf tournament, the Alumni Hall of Fame and the Holiday Auction — this year scheduled for Dec. 5. The move has led to revenue records, according to Hungler.

He added that overall, roughly \$ 2.2 million was raised in 2018, which is a 36% increase from 2016.

Brunelle's efforts have been noticed. She was recently awarded with the inaugural Outstanding Resource Development Professional Award for the Northeast Region during the recent meeting of the MA Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs.

The agency's Northeast Region includes 11 states and 185 Boys & Girls Club organizations, Hungler said. He added some states, including Massachusetts, have 39 organizations. In states such as Delaware, all clubs are part of one organization.

The award was created to recognize a Boys & Girls Clubs resource development professional "who exhibits excellence in resource development and whose dedication and tenacity are met with leadership, ingenuity and high ethical standards to build and strengthen a culture of philanthropy in their club and their communities," according to Hungler.

"Angel was selected based on the impact her work makes to achieve the mission of the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell, her leadership and her personal commitment to professional development," said Lisa Hunter, a representative of the Boys & Girls Club of America.

Inside Brunelle's office — located in the administrative wing of the local Boys & Girls Club — she has a sign on her desk that states, "Make Today Great." It's a message Brunelle seems to live by.

" Deep down, it's just knowing that, as an adult working with kids, you have the ability to make a difference," Brunelle said. " It's just fun — in whatever way I can — to be a part of who they are and who they become."

With the award, Brunelle is now eligible for the National Outstanding Resource Development Professional Award. The award will be given to one of the five regional winners and presented at the Boys & Girls Clubs of America's Annual Conference in May 2020.

For information about the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell, visit lbgc.org. *Follow Aaron Curtis on Twitter @ aselahcurtis*



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