

New Fatherhood Collaborative Reaches Out to the Community in Northwest Ohio *By David Justus*

Where can a father go when he or his family needs assistance? The Northcoast Fatherhood Collaborative, the first of its type in Northwest Ohio, is answering that question through the coordinated effort of people and organizations willing to take action to help strengthen fathers and their families.

The Northcoast Fatherhood Collaborative was established in July 2007 on the belief that 1) children have the right to be raised by a responsible father and mother; 2) fathers have the right and responsibility to parent their children; 3) fathers and mothers deserve equal respect and consid-

eration; and, 4) responsible fatherhood requires the help of the whole community. Building on these beliefs, the collaborative has an important, three-fold mission:

- Empowering fathers to make a difference in the lives of their children;
- Increasing capacity of fatherhood programs, community organizations, government agencies and other partners that serve fathers by

- Influencing the future of fathers and their children within our community through the promotion of responsible fatherhood.

For this reason, and with the support of the Ohio Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families, Lucas County Commissioners, and more than twenty community-based organizations, the Northcoast Fatherhood Collaborative kicked off the New Year with a Leadership Summit on Fatherhood. The Summit, held January 15, 2008 included keynote speaker and NCAA record quarterback, Chuck Ealey, and OPNFF Board Member, Luis Vazquez, who helped inspire almost 100 community leaders about the collaborative's vision



Mark Robinson, Chuck Ealey, and David Justus

"In talking with organizations that serve fathers, one thing that is very clear is that they will benefit from the increased communication about the needs and services available to fathers and their families in our community," said David Justus, Fatherhood Coordinator. "Quite simply, we are addressing responsible fatherhood in a unified way."

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for responsible fatherhood in Northwest Ohio.

Through the collaborative's website and new fatherhood hotline, in association with United Way 2-1-1, fathers and community leaders are now able to quickly and easily access

information on the following types of services:

- Employment and career enhancement programs;
- Parenting classes for expecting and/or current fathers;
- Child support assistance for single/divorced fathers;
- Faith-based and community-outreach programs;
- Plus information for adoptive, stepfathers or grandfathers.

According to Mark Robinson, the Fatherhood Collaborative's Community Organizer, "Often, the first step to solving any problem is knowledge. In many cases, fathers are looking for an answer, but they are only kept from helping their families because they do not know where to find help. The Northcoast Fatherhood Collaborative is an important part of our community's answer."

For more information on the Northcoast Fatherhood Collaborative, visit www.northcoastfathers.org



Toledo Leadership Summit on Fatherhood, January 15,

ForeverDads Delivers Diverse and Comprehensive Programming for Fathers in Muskingum County

By Burl Lemon, Executive Director, ForeverDads

ForeverDads became a non-profit 501(c) (3) corporation in June of 2006 after having started as a program called the **Fatherhood Initiative** or **Fathers Matter** whose oversight was Pro Muskingum, the Families & Children First Council of Muskingum County. OPNFF Board Member James McDonald championed this cause for Dads, forging together the financial resources from the Federal and State government at the turn of the century – 2001, as well as the collaborative community resources, and then committed to address the father absence agenda. From this endeavor was created the **Fatherhood Resource Center** that has continued to serve as a needs assessment center and bridges the community resources to fathers and their families.

Continuing to rally the community to the fatherhood focus that strengthens the family, James expanded our influence by engaging fathers in a curriculum (*Nurturing Fathers Program* – Mark Perlman) that would help them identify how to be a better father and stay connected. In addition to the educational piece, he knew that creating opportunities for

dads to spend time with their children was important. As a result, he began the first *All Pro Dad Breakfast* program in Muskingum County (an opportunity for dads to go to school with their children, have breakfast, hear another dad share his fathering experiences, give away a few door prizes, then go on to work while the children go to school). Before leaving the directorship of the **Fatherhood Initiative**, James with great vision, brought the dads together for a first ever, **All Star Dads Day** (a day prior to Father's Day where all kids throughout the county are invited to bring their dads and celebrate fatherhood – swimming, sack races, basketball hot shot contests, water balloon toss, a picnic with door prizes – spending time with dad hosted at our local Family Y) and this continues to be underwritten through grants and community donations.

From those early days, we have moved forward. Burl Lemon, the executive director, serves along side with a board of directors whose focus is on connecting together all facets of the fatherhood face. Being a community based organization, a natural choice to accomplish this has been to link with the social service agencies, faith based & community groups, the courts, correctional facilities, public as well as private schools, business and manufacturing entities, plus the ser-

vice clubs to better serve fathers. One of the outgrowths of these relationships was the compilation, development, printing and distribution of our **Dads Resource Guide** www.foreverdads.com/DadsRGuide.pdf. This tool provides dads an easy access to community resources, ideas of how to spend special time with their children and promotes healthy fathering lifestyles.

We use our mission statement “**to celebrate and strengthen fatherhood**” as our litmus test for all decisions we make in the work we do, the programs we deliver, the events we create and how we develop our leadership both paid and volunteer. It is out of these criteria that we have spent this past year creating the template of our organization.

Programs: we have continued delivery of the *Nurturing Fathers Program* www.nurturingfathers.com, titled the **NFL (Nurturing Fathers for Life)** which is a 12 week program delivery that serves as our introductory program. Participants become members of the *NFL Alumni Association* upon their graduation. The association hosts monthly “grab a cup of coffee” breaks.

We now have four (4) schools hosting the **All Pro Dad Breakfast** www.allprodad.com with four (4) additional locations beginning this next year. Each of these locations forms an “All Pro

Dads Council” with a head coach, offensive and defensive coordinator, special teams coach and a quarterback club to organize events.

Boot Camp for New Dads www.bcnd.org is one of our latest ventures. Thanks to the support of OPNFF Board Member Steve Killpack, Community Endeavors Foundation, and MetroHealth Medical Center in Cleveland, after a year of working on this project, we kicked it off in November. (See article on page 3) A local foundation has provided the seed money to begin this program which is delivered monthly at one of our local fire stations, in fact it is the first *Boot Camp for New Dads* held in a fire house.

One of the greatest ways to involve the largest number of dads at school is through our newest program, **Watch D.O.G.S. (Dad of Great Students)** www.fathers.com/watchdogs. One of our elementary schools agreed to participate in this father volunteer program where fathers spend a day at school once or twice a year. We encourage all types of dads or father figures, step-fathers, uncles, grandfathers, to be there before the doors open. These dads will get kids on and off the bus, sit with them during lunch, join in the games on the playground, play in the gym or just “hang out.” The school staff is pleased to have this role model in their learning environment.

Addressing abuse, domestic violence and anger is another critical piece of our purpose. For this reason, we offer a

Is your program a promising practice? Please send articles and photos to us: info@opnff.net

(Continued on page 4)



Father learns best

Boot Camp for New Dads teaches first-time fathers what to expect when baby arrives

BY MIKE WAGNER THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH (reprinted with permission)

ZANESVILLE, Ohio -- The deep yawns came in waves as Chris Lemon slumped in a chair with eyes that wanted to close. The new dad, whose son just turned 10 days old, had listened to veteran fathers describe the challenges of caring for a baby when he decided to make a confession.

"Sometimes when I hear my son crying in the night, I pretend to be asleep so his mom will take care of it," said Lemon, 22. "I miss sleep."

The admission was met with laughter and head nods at the Boot Camp for New Dads held yesterday morning at Zanesville Fire Station No. 3.

"For many guys it's the first time they are pulled in different directions with a baby and mom and a job," said Mike Northrop, 26, as his 8-month-old daughter, Riley, clung to his leg. "It's not easy, but we are here to help."

For decades, much has been done to prepare expecting mothers for the obstacles of caring for their first child, but new fathers are typically left to figure it out on their own when the baby arrives.

That has started to change. More expecting fathers are seeking guidance and training from those who have worked the overnight baby shift or comforted a mother suffering from postpartum depression.

The Boot Camp for New Dads program started in Irvine, Calif., on Father's Day in 1990. It has since spread to 260 sites across the nation, including several in Ohio. Organizers expect one to be set up in Columbus next month. More than 150,000 men have completed the boot camp.

Men typically attend the workshops one or two months before their baby is born. The three-hour programs are run by veteran dads who refer to themselves as coaches or even "drool instructors." The veterans, who typically have been through the workshop, bring their own babies.

The men learn to handle, feed, burp and swaddle an infant and much more.

Discussion topics often include planning to take time off work, tackling the financial pressures of caring for the child, dealing with an overbearing relative and even preparing to abstain

from sex for from six weeks to several months.

"A lot of the guys are shocked and feel like they are second in the relationship behind the baby," said Greg Bishop, founder of the Boot Camp for New Dads organization and author of the book *Hit The Ground Crawling*. "We help them focus on how to bond with both their wife and child."

Bishop said he has seen men react in every possible way to the workshops.

"One guy walked in, looked around the room, said he couldn't handle this and didn't want his baby," said Bishop, a father of four who specializes in trauma care at U.S. hospitals. "Some guys just panic."

There were an estimated 4.3 million births in the United States last year, 3 percent more than 2005, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And each year there are approximately 1.5 million new dads.

The boot camps attract men of all types, ages, cultural backgrounds and

economic levels, but both local and national officials say they hope to lure more teenage fathers-to-be.

The teen birth rate rose 3 percent between 2005 and 2006, according to the CDC, ending a 34-percentage-point decline from its peak in 1991.

"Our teen pregnancies are up in this area so this program is needed here," said Andrea Retherford, coordinator of childbirth education for Genesis HealthCare System, which runs two hospitals and other medical centers in Zanesville.

"There are many new dads out there that have never been around a newborn baby, let alone being the one that holds the baby and is responsible for it."

To register for boot camps in Zanesville, which are free and sponsored by the local group Forever Dads, Genesis HealthCare System and the local fire department, call 740-455-4949.

To find Boot Camp for New Dads programs in other Ohio counties and cities, contact OPNFF at info@opnff.net

Would you like to start a Boot Camp for New Dads program in your area? Contact us at info@opnff.net and we will help you get started. Launching a Boot Camp for New Dads program (also known as Daddy Boot Camp) is the best way to introduce father-friendly programming to your community and at a very low start-up cost! For more information about the program, check out these websites, www.newdads.com and www.bcnd.org

www.opnff.net



OPNFF

Ohio Practitioners' Network
for Fathers and Families

PO Box 94078, Cleveland, Ohio 44101
info@opnff.net

JOIN US! And be part of a growing network of over 500 fatherhood advocates & practitioners.

Membership in OPNFF is
FREE: join online today
www.opnff.net

ADVANCE FATHERHOOD OHIO! SUMMIT

Friday May 30, 2008

10:00 am to 3:30 pm

FREE

KingsGate Marriott Hotel @ University of Cincinnati

- Convening hundreds of public and private stakeholders, fathers, advocates and practitioners to learn about, discuss and set action steps for public policy affecting fathers and families

Sponsors: OPNFF, Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, Ohio Office of Child Support, and the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood.

(Continued from page 2)

program called **CompassionPower**, a holistic parenting series. www.compassionpower.com The delivery of this program is a partnership with a local school district, the ABLE (Adult Basic Literacy Education) program who works with students toward their GED. This curriculum is taught by a license mental health professional and is weekly for 15 sessions of two hour each.

InsideOut Dads www.fatherhood.org/insideoutdad.asp is a national best practice curriculum designed specifically for the prison system. We have chosen to deliver this course the first quarter of the year to those in our county correctional facility. Those in our faith based community who have in the past been visiting local inmates have agreed to be trained and offer their time to facilitate this program. The key to this localized program is that his family as well as the education and work opportunity resources are here and the facilitators can work toward bridging the gap that typically begins as a result of incarceration in the life of the father with his family. This is a 12 week program with 26 additional sessions that can be delivered outside the facility on a continued cycle basis that provide connection to a support group upon release.

Out for Good is a community collaborative effort that has just begun. This is Muskingum County's title for our reentry program. The initial stages started by bringing reentry experienced state support, the parole authority, the prison system leaders plus the pieces of the puzzle within our community that are the resources to a healthy solution for those fathers who want to journey with us as we assist them and their families. In short, we are endeavoring to look at transitional resources, housing, employment/income, family or relationship connections, accountability/life coaching, faith/community support and education/training as to how these elements will reduce their recidivism.

Our CDL (Coaching Dads for Life) program is the compilation of all the volunteer leaderships within all our programs and events. Training these fathers to serve as life coaches, facilitators or activity volunteers is the foundational base that will allow for the expansion of our reach with our limited funding. Already we have seen clear demonstrations of the effectiveness of these mentors and their ability to bring others to become involved in our mission.

ForeverDads www.foreverdads.com has seen great growth, but the greatest picture is when a father who had been uninvolved because of whatever barrier, begins to participate, finds strength and begins celebrating his great honor of being a father – then we have done our job. When these same men begin helping other fathers do likewise, we smile.

We must always remember, "if you're a father – you're forever a dad."