

Features

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Jones bids adieu to Big Brothers Big Sisters



DEBORAH JONES is retiring from Big Brothers Big Sisters of El Dorado County. She has been with the organization since 1988 when she started as a case manager. She then served as the assistant for almost 10 years before becoming the executive director in 1997. Democrat photo by Krysten Kellur

Deborah Jones, 60, has been the executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of El Dorado County for 23 years.

She has been with the organization since 1988 when she was first hired as a case manager and served as the assistant for almost 10 years before accepting the position of executive director in 1997.

She has been busy in her time at the helm. Under her able leadership Big Brothers Big Sisters grew from 25 matches to almost 200 matches presently.

Changes

“In college — I graduated from the University of North Dakota — I studied social work, but when I got out of school I went into banking. I took some banking management courses and went into commercial banking. I moved here in 1985 and took a job as a banker. I was married to my husband John at the time. But six months after we moved here he got cancer and died. After his death I went back to my social work roots. It became important for me to do something meaningful with my life and with children — so in 1988 I took a job as a case manager at Big Brothers Big Sisters. At the time there were only 25 children in the program. Over time we have grown to 200. I never had children of my own but I feel like I have 200 children,” Jones said.

Jones said that she had to wear a lot of hats at Big Brothers Big Sisters over the years. People always wondered what she did to keep motivated.

“I always keep a picture of one of our children and their big brother or big sister on the wall in my office,” she said. It keeps things in perspective and never lets her forget what Big Brothers Big Sisters is all about — it’s about the kids,” she said.

New path

Now Jones is retiring and moving into a new phase of her life and she is embracing it with all the zest and passion she exhibited in her years at Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Big on Jones' "to do" list is spending time with her family. She is one of seven children and was raised on a farm in North Dakota — which is probably one of the reasons she was never afraid of hard work.

She wants to spend more time with her father, who's now 83. She also plans to take some time off and travel. Her first trip will be a visit to see her brother who just moved from Minnesota to South Carolina.

In addition she has nieces and nephews sprinkled around the country and she plans on visiting them all.

"I want to spend time with my family — I want to stay connected," she said.

The transition

Jones' dedication and devotion to Big Brothers Big Sisters is evident in the transition process. Jones is using some of her vacation time to help the new executive director, Janna Genovese settle into the position.

"She (Genovese) is a wonderful addition to Big Brothers Big Sisters. She's the former executive director of the Women's Center in South Lake Tahoe. Then she moved to Arizona to be an executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters and then she moved back here to take this position," Jones said.

"This is a great program. There are 200 volunteers in the mentoring program. Our board or directors is all volunteer and we have a wonderful working staff. Then we have other volunteers that help in the community with our fundraising efforts. All is in order — this is a good time for me to move on," Jones said.

The program

Big Brothers Big Sisters is a program for and about kids. Its mission is to help children reach their potential through professionally supported, one-to-one relationships with measurable impact.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is committed to developing successful mentoring relationships for all children who need and want them. This program contributes to brighter futures for the children, better schools and stronger communities for all.

"It's a program that matches caring adults with kids at risk. It's all about keeping children safe and giving them a positive outlet in their life. The role is to be a friend — not a parent.

The volunteer's role is about being there for the child — to care and be a positive role model. They are not there to fix this child's life — but they can be there to make the child's day a little brighter," Jones said.

When matching volunteers and children Jones has a basic principle that she follows — "If I wouldn't match a volunteer with my own child, I won't match them with our children here," she said.

Jones is quick to point out that just because a volunteer is not suited for their program does not mean that they don't have gifts to share with the community and she encourages them to find another outlet in which to share their gifts and talents that might be a better fit for them.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is located at 56 Main St. in Placerville.

For more information call 530-626-1222, go to info@mentors4youth.org or go to Mentors4Youth.Org.

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