

FROM THE

executive director



Today, as I looked online at snow blowers for our office, and the brand on sale was a brand I'd never heard of, my first thought was that I would ask my dad when I called him on my way home. He would know – he could probably quote me the page in Consumer Reports. But, alas, I couldn't ask him... As I write this, I have been back to work for only 3 days after losing my father. My father had been sick for too long and I know that he is in a better place and can now rest. That doesn't make it any easier.

I come from a small town in Upstate NY, and throughout the last couple weeks, I realized that the things that were so special about my father are also the things I find so important about our leaders here at 15-LOVE, which in turn shapes our organization as a whole. Maybe that's why 15-LOVE just feels so much like family to me, and no day ever feels like work – no matter how difficult.

People have been telling me stories of how my father had done something immensely kind for them, like co-signing someone's first car loan. I knew her, and knew she had made some bad decisions as a teenager, but my dad was willing to take a chance on her, and it helped turn things around in her life. My dad did many things, big and small, without fanfare, because it was the right thing to do. Because someone needed a chance. Because he was blessed with enough to share. That's exactly what happens here at 15-LOVE. No matter how close you are to 15-LOVE, there are amazing things that happen under the radar because of the people here, that you just don't know about. Even I don't know about them all. I heard a story about an instructor buying dinner for a kid, and telling him to just do the same for another kid when he got older. That kid became one of our most successful graduates, who now sits on our Board of Directors and has bought many dinners for other kids.

Another thing that has come up a lot about my dad is that people appreciated his friendship. That he cared about them, and called to check on them. He made time for them. People from all different backgrounds simply said they would miss him because they didn't have many friends, and they would miss my dad's companionship. No matter how many degrees you had or didn't have, no matter how much money you had or didn't have, what your social, racial, religious or family background looked like, my dad had a way of making people feel special – usually with a joke. Another of my favorite stories of one of our graduates is that he loved to be here because of how diverse 15-LOVE is. Every kid has a reason for being here, but those reasons are never identical and their backgrounds are never identical. It just makes for such an enriching environment, where everyone is treated with the same respect, and everyone gets the same jokes, of which there are many.

So, you see, my dad embodied what we do here at 15-LOVE. He would often ask me about kids, staff and board members he had met along the way when he was able to come here to visit. One of his favorite days was at our Jamboree every summer. He loved the energy and excitement and talking to all the different people who attended. And, quietly, he and my mother usually provided part of the lunch we used to serve. I guess it all makes sense. I still don't know which snow blower to buy, though... I'll miss you, dad...



My dad with my two sons, ages 7 & 9, and my nephew, 1, during Christmas 2016.

Amber Marino

LOCAL TENNIS GROUP HOLDS FUNDRAISER FOR 15-LOVE

The Tri-Level tennis group supported 15-LOVE by holding a fundraiser at Tri-City Fitness. It was a fun day of tennis followed by lunch.

We are so appreciative of their support.



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Want to get involved?

We are always looking for members of the community to help with our programs while sharing their skills and interests with our kids.

Tennis Equipment Donations

College Prep & Leadership

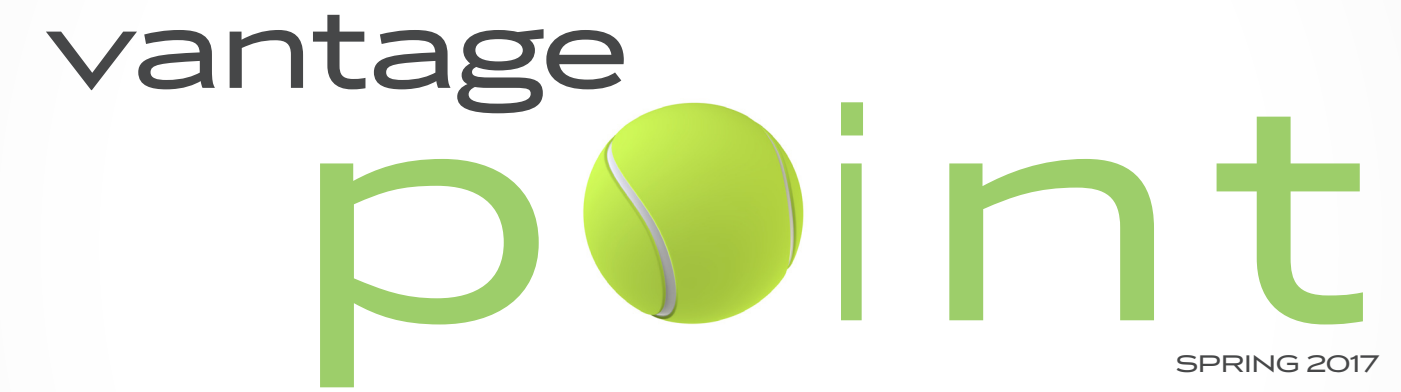
Healthy Futures Program

Healthy Cooking Program

Children's Book Donations

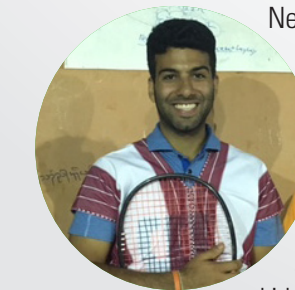
Monetary Donations

15love.org/get-involved



15-LOVE VOLUNTEER BRINGS HIS LOVE FOR TENNIS TO SOUTHEAST ASIA

15-LOVE relies on volunteers throughout the year to maintain programming and help enrich participant's lives. In 2009, 15-LOVE met Neema Moghadam then a sophomore at the University of Albany, and an avid tennis player with a strong desire to give back to his community. Neema's years of teaching tennis to adults and children made him the perfect fit as a volunteer tennis instructor for 15-LOVE.



"Tennis has been a very big part of my life and I truly believe in its benefits from both a body and mental health perspective," said Neema. "I was delighted to find 15-LOVE, it combined two of my favorite things – tennis and giving back."

Neema worked closely with 15-LOVE Program Director Domingo Montes to expand 15-LOVE's impact on after-school site visits. Domingo showed Neema that 15-LOVE was not just about tennis, but about impacting kids' lives in a meaningful way through sports and education. Neema's inspiration traveled to the Albany Business Leaders Emerging (ABLE) group where he was President. ABLE is a group of 150 students who share a passion for professional development and community service. They were so moved by the 15-LOVE mission that they volunteered for 15-LOVE's Book Power Club at Giffen Elementary School every Thursday for six years. (cont. on page 3.)

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Neema leads TMK children in warmup.

(cont. from page 1.)

Flash forward to 2016, Neema brought his love for tennis across the globe to Thoo Mweh Khee (TMK), a school located at the border of Thailand and Myanmar. After graduating and working for a software company for several years, Neema decided he wanted to see some of the world. He knew that he wanted to pursue his love of tennis with traveling and philanthropy, so he started researching places and found TMK. The school has about 600 students from 1st grade through college level.

He and his girlfriend embarked on a two-month adventure that included teaching students the fundamentals of tennis and built a small scale tennis court with duct tape and a badminton net. "The students had never played tennis before, but knew they were eager to learn new things," said Neema. "It was so rewarding to see many students who never found a sport they liked, pick up tennis and make it their own. They learned about self-confidence, discipline, teamwork and sportsmanship." To ensure they program continued after they left, Neema selected and worked with three student leaders who would encourage their peers to keep playing tennis.

For more information about TMK, visit www.thoomwehkheeschool.org/about



TMK children playing tennis.

CLINICIAN OF THE YEAR

15-LOVE Program Director Domingo Montes was recently awarded Clinician of the Year by the United States Tennis Association, Eastern for his dedication and enthusiasm in teaching USTA programs, and helping to increase player participation and retention in the section. **Congrats Domingo!**



Domingo receives Clinician of the Year at the 2017 Eastern Tennis Conference. Photo Courtesy/Jim Alfalla.

15-LOVE'S NEWS IS GOING GREEN



In effort to keep you up-to-date on all of 15-LOVE's new happenings, while keeping printing and postage costs low, we will be communicating more through email.

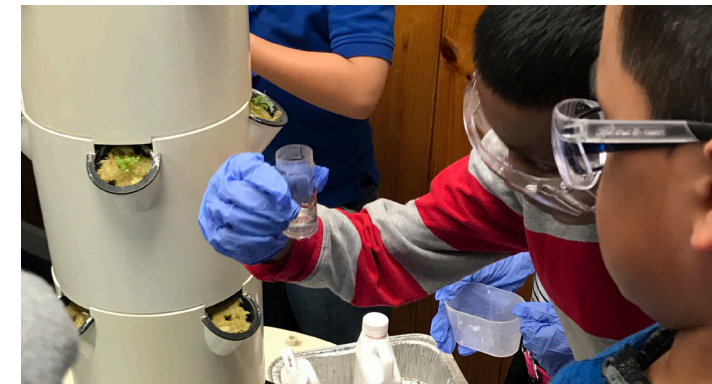
We want to make sure you receive our e-newsletter, so please email miaertas@15love.org, or you can call our office to have your name added to our electronic mailing list. We **promise** not to flood your inbox. We appreciate your support!

HEALTHY FUTURES

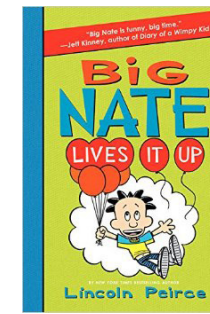
We are proud to say that in 2016, we have expanded our program offerings! For decades we have strived to provide educational opportunities to children in the Capital Region. Our general program has successfully reached out to children of all ages, and brought many new families into our Excellence Program. We have developed Book Clubs to target younger participants and healthy cooking classes to bring together the diverse group of families in our program. One of our most impactful educational efforts has been with our weekly College Prep and Leadership Program, which targets Excellence members in grades 8-12. In an effort to begin reaching out more to the younger members of our Excellence team, and to bring in new faces to expand the program, we have created a weekly Healthy Futures Club. The Healthy Futures Club caters towards children ages 6-11 and takes a comprehensive approach to child development.

The program features lessons and activities ranging in topics like team work and self-awareness, to math, science, and healthy living. Each week participants return to join us for engaging activities that help to spark their curiosity and excitement for these topics. Everyone is also given the opportunity to select books to take home. As an incentive to read the books, participants get to pick out a small prize each week that they work on their reading journal. Although the kids love the prizes and fun educational games, one of the best parts of the program, has been the great group of kids who have decided to participate. The various backgrounds, grade levels, and cultures seen in the group give the participants a great opportunity to interact with different children in a setting where they can grow and feel confident. At 15-LOVE it is our mantra to "work with the whole child" and this program has allowed us to really get to know this younger group of participants and their families, so that we can better provide them with the resources they need to succeed.

We have been fortunate to receive great support from local community members, and organizations like Cornell Cooperative Extension and Eat Smart NY, making the future of the program very bright! If you, or someone you know, are **interested in leading an activity for the Healthy Futures group, please contact Brie** in our office for more information.



DENISE MCCOY LEGACY AWARD



Lincoln Peirce, author of the Big Nate comic strip and the Big Nate series children's books was awarded the 2016 Denise McCoy Legacy Award for his book, *Big Nate Lives It Up* at a cocktail reception at the Fort Orange Club. Peirce was originally set to speak to children at Arbor Hill, but that was cancelled due to a snow day. The students still each received a free signed copy of the award-winning book.

This is the 11th year that the award has been presented to an author of a humorous children's book in order to honor the late Denise McCoy, founder of the Bookmark bookstore in Loudonville, which devoted more than a third of its shop to children's books.



Lincoln Peirce received the Denise McCoy Legacy Award from Tom O'Brien, Denise McCoy's brother.



15-LOVE delivered *Big Nate Lives it Up* books to Arbor Hill Principal Rosalin Gaines-Harrell.

FIRST ANNUAL TENNIS-A-THON

15-LOVE served up fun by holding its first annual Tennis-a-Thon. Participants hit serves to help raise money to support 15-LOVE programming. The Tennis-a-Thon happened over multiple weekends at different locations across the region with an exceptional turnout. The Excellence kids exceeded their goal of raising \$3,000. **A big congratulations** to all who helped make this **event a success!**



15-LOVE Excellence participants hit serves at the kick off of the tennis-a-thon.

YEAR IN PICTURES

