

Squadron Capital expands local access to summer camp with \$100,000 donation to the YMCA

Since mid-March children in Connecticut have been at home with little peer interaction, spending hours on electronic devices, and not having much access to outdoor activity. Summer has finally arrived, cases of COVID-19 are down in Connecticut, and summer day camps have been given the clearance to operate with additional cleaning and safety procedures instituted by the state Office of Early Childhood.

David Pelizzon, president of Squadron Capital in Granby, Connecticut, believes the summer camp experience will be more important than ever this year. "With kids cooped up from COVID, families struggling from the resulting economic downturn, and the emerging social issues that have always been there but are becoming more prominent, I thought: 'how can I help families, children and the community all at once?'"

His answer was a record-setting donation of \$100,000 that Pelizzon and his company made to the YMCA of Greater Hartford targeted at providing financial assistance so that more children can attend summer day camp this year.

For many families, summer camp has always been a luxury, a fact that is amplified this year as Connecticut's unemployment rate rose to 9.4 percent in May, up from 3.7 percent just one year earlier. Now, because of Pelizzon's donation, that luxury will be a reality for kids across northern Connecticut.

"You're only young for a short period, and the circumstances this year are hard on everyone, but particularly cruel on kids," Pelizzon said. "Part of their youth has been stolen by something out of their control. This is a really worthwhile way to get some of that back."

The YMCA offered America's first known summer camp starting in 1885, and since then The Y has been a leader in summer programming for children. A core tenant of YMCA camping is instilling the values of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility. At a check presentation held on June 16, Pelizzon met with the summer camp counselors at the Farmington Valley YMCA who were preparing for their first week of camp. Many of those counselors are high school and college students having their first work experience. Pelizzon addressed the importance of this: "Our country needs more leaders, and leaders with the right set of values and experience. Any chance you can get for more leadership opportunities and experience is critical. The best thing you can do in high school and college is get a job at a place like summer camp or a local organization where you can lead, inspire, and motivate others."

At the check presentation, Harold Sparrow, President and CEO of the YMCA of Greater Hartford, told a story to the young counselors of how camp impacted him in the way that Pelizzon was referring to: "I came from a single-parent family and was a scholarship kid. My first experience with the YMCA was at a day camp like the one here at Farmington Valley. The impact that you have on these young people is absolutely life changing. Michael Goldman was my first camp counselor when I was 9 years old, and to this day I never forget his name and how he helped me feel good, happy and welcome. The work we do is important. We do save, change and transform lives every day."

Then, addressing Pelizzon, Sparrow added, "I started as a YMCA camper, and I want you to understand that the investment that you made does change lives, and does make transformational experiences for young people that may not have been possible otherwise."

Pelizzon recognized that broad impact, which he said was why he chose the Y: "The Y reaches across economic and social spectrums. It is also very well distributed, not just in urban areas, but in rural and suburban areas like Granby, where the Y has had a big impact in the community. If you want to impact a lot of people, the Y is a great place to make that mark."

This summer the YMCA of Greater Hartford will operate 12 day camps, serving more than 1,000 families across the region.

Pelizzon hopes that with his donation, not only will more children gain access to camp this summer, but also that others will be inspired to contribute to the YMCA and other local organizations.

"Part of me wanted to make an immediate and noticeable impact, but I also wanted to motivate others. If others can accept the fact that we are going through a remarkable period in our nation's history, and that there is a critical need, I would ask that those sitting on the sidelines would ask themselves, 'How can I have an impact right now?' They all have great intentions, but I hope this donation raises that question. Organizations like the Y need to be supported, and you need direct, local investment to make an impact in your community."

If you are interested in summer camp at the YMCA, visit ghymca.org/camp or call your local branch. If you are interested in contributing to the YMCA, please visit ghymca.org/donate to learn more.