

Queens Big Bro honored at ceremony



The Marino Organization

Hector Batista, chief executive officer of Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City; Spencer, Little Brother; Mark Zustovich, Big Brother.

By Gabriel Rom

Mark Zustovich was honored last week by Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City and a host of elected officials as ‘Queens Big Brother of the Year,’ for his commitment to his “Little Brother,” Spencer Ford.



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Zustovich, who lives in Jackson Heights and is the chief public information officer for the Department of Youth and Community Development, was matched with the 14-year-old Spencer four years ago. Their relationship quickly blossomed.

Zustovich introduced Spencer – from Jamaica – to photography as a hobby, and the two now share an annual tradition of creating a photobook with memories from each year.

“It has just been amazing,” Zustovich said. “We have both learned tremendously from the relationship--I consider myself both a friend and a mentor to Spencer.”

The ceremony took place at the organization’s new Jackson Heights location at 82-11 37th Ave., and marks the organization’s expansion into Queens.

The new location will allow nonprofit to more effectively recruit volunteer mentors in the borough, a spokeswoman for the group said.

Following the ribbon-cutting, Nick Gulotta, the mayor’s Queens borough director, and representatives from the offices of U.S. Rep. Joe Crowley (D-Jackson Heights), state Assemblyman Francisco Moya (D-Jackson Heights), state Sen. Jose Peralta (D-Jackson Heights), and Councilwoman Karen Koslowitz (D-Forest Hills) took part in the ceremony.

“The diverse, passionate spirit that characterizes Queens is a reflection of our organization as well,” said Hector Batista, chief executive officer of Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City. “Our new office in Queens will allow us to more effectively reach deeply into the communities that make up this incredible borough and identify hundreds of caring adult mentors like Mark,” Batista added.

“And with the amazing support of the Queens community, I am confident we will be able to take our organization’s services in this borough to new heights.”

By the end of 2016, organizers said that they hope to pair hundreds of children who are currently awaiting a match with caring adult role models, or “Bigs.” The group, which is New York’s largest youth mentoring organization, currently serves more than 5,000 young people each year through a variety of specialized mentoring programs.

Mentoring is open to adults 21 or older who live in the five boroughs, and it is free to volunteer.

To become a volunteer mentor, donate or learn more about Big Brothers Big Sisters of NYC and National Mentoring Month, those interested can visit www.bigsnyc.org/.

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