

Wayland resident helps send bereaved children to camp

By Megan Webb

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WAYLAND — It's hard to imagine anything more devastating to a family than the loss of a parent.

At least that's what Wayland resident Jeffrey Baron thought last fall when he signed on as the new development chair of the Wildflower Camp Foundation.



A Wellesley-based nonprofit organization founded by president Cyndi Jones, Wildflower Camp Foundation provides scholarship assistance for summer camp and enrichment programs to families in which a parent has died.

Under Baron's year-long chairmanship Wildflower raised more than \$100,000, allowing the organization to send 33 children from Massachusetts who have lost a parent to camps this summer – the most in the history of the organization.

Baron also took a strong leadership role in a new fundraising event for the organization on Oct. 1 with the Rodman Ride for Kids, an umbrella matching gift charity that raises funds for youth-focused social service agencies that support at-risk kids in Massachusetts.

Ten riders from Wildflower participated in the 25-, 50- and 100-mile non-competitive cycling tour. Wildflower ended up doubling its fundraising goal of \$20,000 and brought home nearly \$40,000, almost a quarter of which was generated by Baron singlehandedly as a "Team Wildflower" virtual rider.

When asked why Wildflower's cause is so near and dear to his heart, Baron says, "I went to summer camp for eight years as a child and my two daughters go to camp every summer. I understand how valuable the camp experience is, especially for those children and families who have suffered such an unforeseen loss."

Baron and the rest of the Wildflower organization recognize that bereaved children are at risk both emotionally and developmentally after facing the devastating loss of a parent. The camp

experience of carefree summer days, the comfort of friends and mentors, and a break from a life in turmoil is an invaluable and transformative experience.

Returning to the same camp each summer offers a sense of stability to the children and allows the surviving parent an opportunity to provide a more stable environment when his or her children return home.



“Bereaved families are really an underserved group of people who kind of get lost in the shuffle. Camp is a luxury but is one that is really needed for these families,” said Baron. “With the collaboration of our amazing camp partners, the generosity of our donors, and the dedication of our incredible volunteers, we are able to ensure a lasting impact on these families’ futures.”

Baron is a financial advisor for Northwestern Mutual in Boston. Alongside his involvement with Wildflower, he is also the chairman of the Father-Daughter Breakfast Club in Wayland.

Wildflower provides financial and emotional support as well as guidance to parents in finding environments in which children can begin to heal – where children’s spirits, creativity and talents can be nurtured and they can begin to thrive again.

The organization is currently in the middle of its annual fundraising campaign. Since its inception in 2004, Wildflower has sent more than 144 children to camps all over New England and beyond. Every dollar raised helps a child in need.

To learn more about Wildflower or to donate go online (www.wildflowercampfoundation.org).

Megan Webb is a volunteer for the Wildflower Camp Foundation.

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