

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item D-1
April 12, 2016
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Jim Cason
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Frank Quesada
Commissioner Jeannett Slesnick

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
City Attorney, Craig E. Leen
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Lydia Muniz, President and CEO, Big Brothers Big Sisters
Gil Nelson, Executive Vice President
Bob Sturgis, Alumni Big Brother

Agenda Item D-1 [Start: 10:04:50 a.m.]

Presentation on the Big Brothers Big Sisters Program

Mayor Cason: Next we have a presentation on the Big Brothers Big Sisters Program. If you'd like to come up.

Good morning Mayor, Council members, South Leadership Team, my name is Lydia Muniz, I'm the President and CEO of Big Brothers and Big Sisters, and I want to start off just by saying April is National Volunteer Month and this is actually National Volunteer Week; and of course we at Big Brothers and Big Sisters, along with many other charitable organizations, are extremely grateful for all the volunteers who give selflessly of their time to help others, and we know we just have five minutes, so I'll certainly be brief. We met with Mayor Cason not too long ago, and back in about 2000, believe it or not, the turn of the century, we had an official partnership with

the City of Coral Gables to promote voluntarism, and to help children, not only in the City of Coral Gables, but certainly throughout the community; and it was part of a national initiative that we were part of called, “Americas Promise” on really transitioning and transforming children’s lives, and that’s the Big Brothers Big Sisters is all about. So, I have with me today, and I hope that the City would consider restoring that partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters, really to as I said to encourage, not only City employees, but Coral Gables residents to volunteer, to give back in whatever way seems to fit with their schedules and their time availability. I’d like to bring up our Executive Vice President Gil Nelson, who will tell you a little bit about our various programs, very briefly and we’ll close with one of our alumni Big Brothers and past Chairs of the Board who’ll share his personal story with you. I have some packets that I’ll leave with the staff in case you can take a look at them afterwards. Thank you. Gil.

Mr. Nelson: Mr. Mayor and Commission, thank you for having us today. Mentor by definition is a trusted friend and counsel, and we are just very fortunate and am pleased to announce that we are serving more Coral Gables high school students than ever before. In addition to that, we have a number of companies that are expressing their social responsibility as well, the Hyatt Coral Gables, International Finance Bank, are also involved, Habas Media, Cargio, and also Carnival Cruise Lines is certainly serving Coral Gables High School students. We also have University of Miami, as well as Doctor’s Hospital that are also serving as workplace mentoring partners. And what you’ll find in your packets that you’ll receive, is that we have a number of menus of mentoring options. Those options include, mentoring at a school one hour a week; those options include our traditional community base mentoring program, where a mentor or Big Brother or Big Sister picks up their “Little,” they go and spend that quality time together, then that mentor takes that child home. Our fastest growing program is school-to-work; workplace mentoring, that allows corporate professionals to mentor without ever leaving the job. And so in short, there is something for everybody, and we have Police and Fire with us this morning as appropriate getting their recognitions. We have a number of municipalities partners that are allowing their Police and Fire Departments to get involved mentoring at a local school. It builds trust and it helps strengthen the community. We call it affectionately “Bigs in Blue” and “Bigs in Red,” you know which one is which. And so thank you for this opportunity, and we think about our impact as an organization its best stated from one of our “Bigs” we are pleased to have with us today alumni Big Brother Bob Sturgis.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Mr. Sturgis: Good morning. As a longtime resident of Coral Gables, I want to thank my Mayor, my Council for taking time to listen to a brief presentation of Big Brothers Big Sisters, an organization that I’ve been involved with for over 30 years, near and dear to my heart. I’ve seen firsthand the invaluable work this agency does. I served as the Chairman of the Board of

Governors for over ten years. I've been a Big Brother and my son has been a Big Brother as well; and I've seen this agency grow under the dynamic leadership of Lydia. When I first got involved there were only about 250 young people that were served by the agency. That's increased by almost tenfold under her leadership, and the need is so much greater. I remember when I first met my "Little Brother," who is now a high school graduate, has a very nice productive job, living a very successful and happy life, but his sister was on the waiting list and there just weren't available resources to help her. His live turned in a very positive direction, and unfortunately his sister wound up in a series of foster care and incarceration, and just went in the opposite direction. I don't think that's a coincidence, and that story has been repeated all over this County and all of our community. So anything our City can do to help support the invaluable and very worthwhile work of Big Brothers Big Sisters would be very much appreciated.

Commissioner Sturgis: Let me ask; is this program in Coral Gables mainly run out of Coral Gables High School?

Mr. Sturgis: You know I like the program – there are various shapes and forms that the services can take.

Mr. Nelson: It's not limited to Coral Gables High.

Commissioner Slesnick: I used to be a Big Brother or Big Sister to a young man, but I left the country to work and I never got back in the program, but it was very worthwhile when I did it, and I applaud you. So again, I interrupted you, its run in Coral Gables High School and around the rest of the community.

Mr. Nelson: Within the entire community, and we have school based programming, but it's not limited to Coral Gables High School. Any resident, any employee can volunteer.

Commissioner Slesnick: And at least a minimum of one hour a week.

Mr. Nelson: That is correct.

Mayor Cason: Did I notice your headquarters on, is it on LeJeune?

Mr. Nelson: 550 LeJeune.

Mayor Cason: I just noticed that yesterday driving back from the airport. I think it's a great program. We had a nice discussion, I hope that Police and Fire, and others who are watching will get engaged, it's a small amount of time, but it's really important to help.

Mr. Sturgis: You know when I got involved, I have three children, my said to me, do you have enough time?- you don't have enough time for our own three children it seems sometimes, you know; and I said, you know I think this is something that is so important to do and I can tell you as a parent, my kids seeing me involved in the program was one of the best things I could ever do as a parent; and I never asked my son to become involved, but one day he said to me, dad I decided to become a Big Brother, so you know it's amazing what we can do through our actions as parents and how much value we can communicate to our children that way. So anything, especially in volunteer recruitment, because that's where there is such a great need where the City could help and get people interested in the program and get more volunteers because the need is so great.

Mayor Cason: Well, I applaud you for what you are doing. Thank you very much.

Mr. Sturgis: Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thanks for being here.

[End: 10:11:52 a.m.]