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**FORMER TENNIS CHAMP VALUES BOYS & GIRLS CLUB EXPERIENCE**

**FORSYTH, MISSOURI. JUNE 23, 2009:** For those who don't know Patrick Stewart, he can easily be mistaken as a quiet and unassuming recent Forsyth High School graduate. But with a tennis racket in hand, he becomes a force to be reckoned with! The sheer determination that drives this 2008 Class 1 District 6 doubles champion comes from the unbelievable obstacles he has overcome in life and the good that he sees in people.

Stewart, whose mother is a long-time Boys & Girls Club employee, spent his first summer as a Club member at Shadow Rock Park twelve years ago. He recalls being a shy kid who didn't get into trouble over the years, as the Club's programs moved from the park to the school cafeteria and finally to its current facility on Panther Road in 2001. "I had to be good!" Stewart chuckles. "If I got in trouble at the Club, I'd get in bigger trouble at home."

Stewart, now an employee at the Lake Taneycomo Elks Unit in Forsyth, credits former Club directors for instilling confidence and compassion in him at an early age. "The Club helped me when I was going through rough times and that really made a difference in my life. I have a heart for kids, especially the ones that may be struggling with personal stuff, because I can relate to them," says Patrick. As a child, his family dealt with alcoholism and domestic violence, which eventually led to his parents' divorce. For nearly two years, Patrick's mother was hospitalized with meningitis, several months of which she lay in a coma. Patrick and his siblings lived with their now estranged father during that time and endured both physical and verbal abuse. "Being told that I was a lot like my dad when I was younger really motivated me because I didn't want to be anything like him. I made up my mind as a kid that no one was going to decide my future for me!"

Stewart overcame low expectations by developing his own desire to succeed and recently became the first person in his family to graduate from high school. "I am working on getting accepted into college now. I'd like to go to College of the Ozarks," says Stewart, who also plans to major in elementary education. "I want to teach 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade because kids that age have fun personalities. They can still be influenced for good." As a Club employee, Patrick is getting valuable experience for his future career everyday. Stewart works hard to build a sense of family among the kids with which he works directly. "There are no cliques allowed. I want them to learn to care for each other," he explains.

Patrick tries to be a mentor and friend to kids at the Boys & Girls Club, much as his older brother Josh was for him. Stewart remembers his brother always being there to protect him despite the hardships they endured together. Even after moving out of the home as a teen, Josh and Patrick remained close. Josh sustained a traumatic head injury as the result of a car accident which left him with seizures which became more frequent and severe over time, eventually claiming his life on March 10, 2008. "I could talk about him on and on even now because he took such good care of me. I miss him so much," says Stewart.

It is hard for Patrick to imagine where he would be in life if he had not had the Boys & Girls Club as a support system. "I was a pretty angry kid for a long time. I'd probably be roaming the streets or causing trouble if I didn't have the Club." Stewart feels compelled to be a part of that same support system for other kids going through tough times because of what so many people did for him when he needed them the most. As a volunteer and active member of his church youth group, Stewart takes every opportunity to help others, including cleaning up disaster-riddled Mountain Home, AR following the tornadoes of 2008 and recent ice storms. When told that he is a tremendous inspiration to others, Stewart blushes and drops his head. "I'm a 18 year old who is still trying to figure out life. I take every day as it comes and just try to go with the flow."

### **About the Boys & Girls Club of the Ozarks**

In 2008, the Boys & Girls Club of the Ozarks served more than 1,250 school-age youth through after-school, summer and outreach programs at its three locations. In addition to quality programs and activities, Boys & Girls Club members can receive a nutritious meal or snack, academic assistance and age-appropriate personal growth opportunities for only \$25 per school year. In 2009, the Clubs are celebrating 15 years of helping kids in the Ozarks "Be GREAT!"

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For more information about the Boys & Girls Club of the Ozarks or other stories like Patrick's, please contact Autumn Page at 417.335.2089 x 225 or 417.496.9404.

