

San Francisco Chronicle

JEFFERSON AWARD: Presented to Peter Dwares *At-risk kids and coaches make a connection, thanks to him*

Shelah Moody,
Chronicle Staff Writer

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After a successful career as a lawyer and real estate developer, Peter Dwares wanted to give something back to the community. Eight years ago, he founded Pathways for Kids, a nonprofit organization that connects San Francisco's economically disadvantaged inner-city youth with successful mentors, or "coaches."

Through his company, the Dwares Group, he buys and rebuilds older building and commercial buildings in California, Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas and the state of Washington.

"As a great lawyer, Louis Kelso, once told me, in order to do good, you must do well," Dwares said. "You must make some money before you can help others."

Dwares' goal is to help disadvantaged youth break the cycle of poverty.

"I founded Pathways for Kids because there are so many kids who don't have fathers or business people around the house to tell them how to make money or go on to get a good career or to invest," he said. "They remain poor their whole lives. I know a lot of people who have done very well in business. I thought I would bring them in and let them help kids."

"We are there to expose young people to different professions and careers — white-collar and blue-collar — lawyers, doctors, engineers, electricians, plumbers and chefs. We let them see how the people who have succeeded have done it. They then have a goal and decide to stay in school."

Pathways serves more than 900 students, with several in-school and off-campus programs, including career fairs



Peter Dwares of Pathways for Kids

and field trips. Participating schools in San Francisco include Balboa High School, Benjamin Franklin Middle School, Downtown High School, Enola Maxwell Middle School for the Arts, Francisco Middle School, Galileo Academy of Science and Technology, George Washington High School, Gloria R. Davis College Preparatory Academy, Ida B. Wells High School, Independence High School, International Studies Academy, Lowell High School, Mission High School, Phillip and Sala Burton Academic High School, Phoenix Continuation High School, Roosevelt Middle School, Thurgood Marshall High School and Wallenberg High School.

Pathways for Kids also works with after-school programs such as the Excelsior Boys and Girls Club, Hunters Point Boys' and Girls' Club, Mayor's Youth Employment and Education Program, Visitation Valley Boys & Girls Club and Western Addition Beacon Center.

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JEFFERSON AWARD: Presented to Peter Dwares Continued...

Pathways' sponsors include U.S. Bank, Wells Fargo Bank and the Weingeroff Family. Pathways' annual auction/dinner, held in November, raises much of the organization's money for the year.

Past mentors who have worked with Pathways for Kids include former Mayors Frank Jordan and Willie Brown. Mayor Gavin Newsom is honorary chairman of the board.

"We take kids out of the classrooms and take them to businesses," Dwares said. "For example, we do a program with the San Francisco Giants. They bring out their head of marketing and their head of ticket sales. Their people talk to kids about how it is to run the Giants, not just be baseball players, which of course the kids all want to do at 15 or 16."

Freelance chef Marc Vogel has worked with the program since its inception, and is also on the board of directors. Dwares described Vogel as a model coach. "Marc has been a great mentor to kids; they love him," he said. "He has dynamic flair; he dresses up in a beautiful chef costume. He's a very articulate guy, and the most important thing is, he cares about these kids."

Dwares, who grew up in Providence, R.I., earned a bachelor of economics degree from the Wharton School of Finance at the University of Pennsylvania. He received his law degree from American University Washington College of Law and a master's degree in law from Georgetown University.

Dwares moved to the Bay Area in 1971. For 10 years, he sat on the board of the Adopt a Special Needs Kid.

For the past 22 years, Dwares has hosted Uncle Nathan's Day, an annual holiday event for adopted children with disabilities. He finances the event, which takes place in December at his Capitola Village shopping center in Santa Cruz, out of his own pocket.

"We take them on the Felton steam train and give them gifts," he said. "A lot of them are poor, so this is their only holiday. It's my favorite day of the year. These are kids who are adopted and some of them are severely challenged. I've watched them grow up. Some of them are in their 20s, and they were babies when they started to come."

Although Dwares does not have children of his own, he is dedicated to being a role model — in addition to his work with Pathways, he spends time with his nieces and nephews and has a foster child in Ecuador.

"I'd like to see Pathways for Kids used as a model around the country," he said. "We are limited in the amount of programs we can put on by our budget. I'd like to eventually have a huge budget to be able to put on hundreds of programs every year in San Francisco. I'd like to see people take the same kind of concept and do it in other cities where kids need that kind of guidance and mentoring. Obviously, we are dealing with kids who are underserved, disadvantaged, who really need advice on where to go in life and role models. I'd like to see it do more and more, but that requires funding. Anyone who wants to help out is welcome."

For more information, visit www.pathwaysforkids.org. Each week, The Chronicle features a Bay Area resident who has won a Jefferson Award for making a difference in his or her community. The awards are administered by the American Institute for Public Service, a national foundation that honors community service. Bay Area residents profiled in The Chronicle are also featured on CBS 5-TV and KCBS-AM, which are Jefferson Award media partners, along with The Chronicle.

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For further information about Pathways For Kids, go to www.pathwaysforkids.org