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# INCITY TIMES

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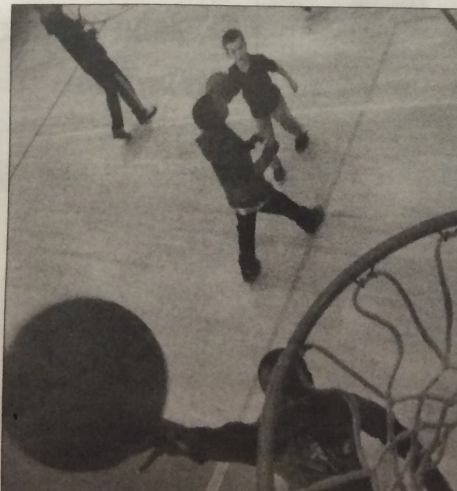
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## Pleased to Meet Me!

*Liz Hamilton, the First Woman Executive Director of the  
Worcester Boys and Girls Club Says, Hello, Woo-town!*







## Pleased to Meet Me!

*Liz Hamilton, the First Woman Executive Director of the Worcester Boys and Girls Club Says, Hello, Woo-town!*

**T**he Boys & Girls Club of Worcester was founded in 1889, and has had a rich history of helping our youth succeed. While it's true that I am the first woman executive director in the Club's 127 years, it's important to know that women have always been closely involved. Women started the movement in Hartford in 1860, and here in Worcester, the Mother's Club ran events and fundraisers all during the 40s. We have two female Olympians in our alumni Hall of Fame: swimmer Albina Osopowich, who won two gold medals and set a world record at the 1928 Summer Olympics in Amsterdam; and Coralie O'Connor, a member of the 1952 Women's Swim Team and women's backstroke champion. Mary DiBara, our first woman board president, who served 2009-2013, directed the capital campaign that raised \$9 million and allowed us to build our flagship, Main South Clubhouse. So, I'm in good company, and I am honored that so many of the impressive female chief execs in Worcester have reached out and welcomed me into their ranks.

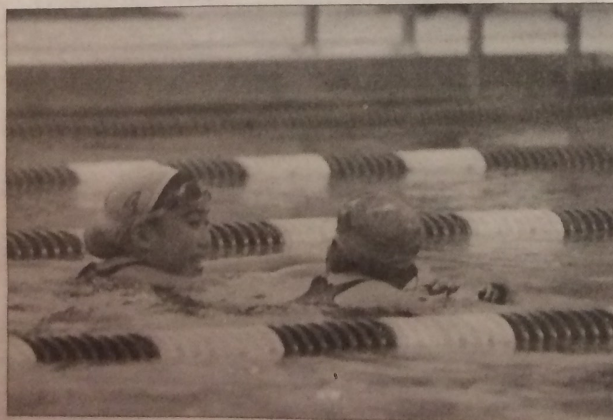
### The Road to Central Mass

I'm not from Worcester, but I have lived here for 14 years. I know that's not enough time to be considered a Worcesterite by natives, but I am definitely a Worcester fan! I got here in a roundabout way, via Denver, Colorado and Great Falls, Montana. I was born in Hackensack, New Jersey, and raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where I at-

tended a Catholic school from kindergarten on. I graduated from Regis University in Denver, and worked as a member of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps for two years. The first year, I was in Great Falls, Montana, and the second in Worcester, working at the Rainbow Child Development Center. That year I was a teacher in the afterschool program and art director for the summer camp, and fell in love with youth work. After my volunteer term, I stayed on in Worcester, continuing to work in Rainbow's education and arts programs. I had been up in the air about my career path, not sure if I wanted to be a journalist, a teacher, or a social worker. When Rich Ardizzone, then the director of Rainbow, asked me to volunteer for SAIN, the Sex Abuse Intervention Network, and edit the SAIN manual for professionals, I saw the impact community organizers and social workers have on society. It was then I decided on social work, specializing in children and families, and I earned my MSW from Boston University.

### Vision for the Club

Our priority is that every kid who comes to the Club feels important and respected. All kids need to feel safe, physically and emotionally, and that is the Club's role: We provide a safe space and give them the resources to transform themselves into the adults they want to be. We want our kids to explore different things, and venture outside their comfort zone. For instance, we encourage kids who come here for bas-





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The vacant space next to the Club is in the process of being turned into a NCAA-regulation playing field. Scheduled completion is Oct. 2016. It's owned by Clark, but we will be able to use it, and we are really looking forward to it. It will double our footprint, for one thing, and also we'll be able to offer track, soccer, flag football, maybe even cross-country skiing in the winter (assuming I can get a grant to pay for it!). We're going to have unheard-of outdoor programs for inner city kids.



ketball to also try our recording studio or a take a job readiness course. When they're here, members are encouraged to talk about anything that affects them: Our staff and volunteers counsel Club kids about everything from bullying to domestic violence to gang targeting, just to name a few. Many of our kids participate in regular group discussions, where they support each other through tough circumstances. As Club kids get older, they pass on their knowledge and mentor the younger kids. Each member over 12 must complete volunteer hours, so, by the time they graduate, Club kids are accustomed to giving back. Our alumni get involved - they contribute to the community. Worcester is genuinely better for the Club's presence here, and that is what drives our staff and volunteers' commitment.

For more than a century, the Club has given disadvantaged kids opportunities that help them become happy, productive, successful members of the community. We are working hard to make sure that today's Club kids can continue that tradition. The Club is about kids, any color and social status, and our mission is to help those who need us most. We make sure their financial position doesn't stand in the way of their opportunities. We charge \$25 per year for membership (\$10 at the two outreach sites), while spending \$500-\$1,000 per kid per year to give them an unmatched selection of fun, educational, lifesaving programs. Yes, we know our business model is upside-down! It's not for wimps, that's for sure. The truth is, the Club can't be judged like a regular business. Here at the Club, more success means more kids joining, which means we have to find more money. In fact, according to Guide Star, we raise more annual funds than 90% of Worcester's nonprofits. Our Club is almost alone in relying on contributions and grants for more than 90% of our budget. We explore all possible means of providing for our kids: To keep costs down, we collaborate with other organizations, for instance we trade classes with Ballet Arts Worcester, with our instructors teaching a hip hop class at the ballet school, and a ballet teacher taking a class of our dancers. Also, we have a thriving volunteer program, and we hire Club teens as "junior staff." Our professional staff is very good at providing homework help, digital arts classes, boxing



Ike McBride, Director of Operations (left), and Liz Hamilton.

instruction, leadership opportunities, therapy, college prep workshops ...! The challenge, as always, is the cost of all these programs.

Right now, I am focused on a strategic plan for financial stability. We are exploring alternative revenue streams like rentals, and partnerships with local health systems and colleges/universities. I don't have all the answers yet, but I am certain that we will find them.

Luckily, I have the most committed board, staff, and volunteers in Worcester, and the support of the community. I've been overwhelmed by the outpouring of good wishes and encouragement, and by the many community leaders who have cheerfully allowed me to pick their brains since I took on the executive director position. I know that, with all this help, I can do my part to guarantee that the Club will still be here, helping Worcester's kids, 127 years from now.

### Professional team making a difference

From School Age Child Care through the program areas, I am lucky to have one of the best teams in Worcester. Ike McBride is a perfect example of a former Club kid who is really making a difference in the community. He is the best ambassador we could ever have because he's been working here for 18 years, a former Youth of the Year, and a member of our alumni Hall of Fame. Ike can engage and communicate with anyone, which is a skill that can't be taught. He is an expert in gang prevention and race relations, and I hope that the community will call on him to use these skills. I could talk about each one of our staff members. The truth is that everyone who works here could make more money somewhere else. The Club and the entire Worcester community are lucky that the staff believe in our mission and are committed to our youth. I invite all community members to please consider sharing their time, talent, or treasure with our organization. Your investment will truly make a difference.

Liz Hamilton is the executive director of the Worcester Boys and Girls Club of Worcester.

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