National PAL Mentor Month

January 1st brought us the beginning of a new year, a new decade and a new initiative at National PAL. This year we launched our first National PAL Mentor Month campaign to highlight PAL mentoring programs throughout the country. During the entire month of January, National PAL came together to promote and celebrate with weekly initiatives to increase the awareness of our programming in hopes of helping more kids and securing more resources to support our work.

We kicked off the month on social media with the introduction of our first ever National PAL Facebook frames and introduced the official campaign hashtags: #WeArePAL and #NPALMentorMonth. On January 7th, we asked our mentors to tell their stories on social media, sharing how PAL has impacted their lives and why they have made the commitment to mentor. Our mentees also shared how their PAL program has made a difference in their lives.

National PAL Open House Day took place on January 14th with PALs across the country hosting open houses on this day and throughout the month. Our Chapters opened their doors to the community with some Chapters seeing as many as 125 new kids on their open house day. During this time, we challenged our Chapters to gather kids and law enforcement officers to a dance duel, which we called the National PAL Dance Challenge. PAL Chapters created dance steps to the tune of Will Smith’s “Gettin’ Jiggy Wit It” and uploaded them to their social media pages.

Finally, January 27–30 was National PAL Mentor Appreciation Week. Our kids are our hearts, but our mentors are the heartbeats. Without them, PAL Chapters would not be possible and this week we celebrated our mentors for all of their hard work, commitment and dedication to our PAL kids. Thank you to all of our PAL Chapters who participated in this inaugural initiative. We anticipate expanding Mentor Month in 2021.

A PAL of Massena youth shares what his mentor taught him during National PAL Mentor Month.

Open houses similar to that of the Rancho Cordova Police Department were hosted all throughout the month of January to recruit youth and volunteers to PAL Chapters.
Mentoring Spotlight: Marietta PAL

In 2007, the Marietta, GA Police Department established the Marietta Police Athletic League (PAL) to prevent juvenile crime and violence by providing civic, athletic, recreational and educational opportunities which create trust and build understanding between Marietta police officers and the youth in the surrounding community. Founded by Lieutenant Michael Goins, Marietta PAL had been his dream for 20 years. With existing community policing initiatives already in place and looking to enhance the relationships between police officers and youth, Marietta PAL partnered with the Marietta Youth Empowerment through Learning, Leading and Serving (YELLS) Mentoring Program in 2008. Since then, Marietta PAL has served more than 6,000 youth while regularly serving over 40 youth each year through their mentoring program.

While using the Cambridge Global Self-Advocacy curriculum, a curriculum that teaches the core skills needed for self-advocacy and persuasion, the Marietta PAL Mentoring Program strongly emphasizes servant leadership. By matching high school aged mentors with elementary school aged mentees, the Marietta PAL Mentoring Program allows the mentoring groups to participate in leadership workshops within the community and then create and develop their own projects in order to implement youth-led service initiatives throughout the community.

With many mentoring groups setting up pitch tables at community events throughout the year, the Franklin Fair is by far the largest and most exciting event in the area as it allows the mentoring groups to learn event planning through recruiting partners, writing proposals for donations and planning a full day event for the community. During the Franklin Fair, Marietta police officers team up with community youth to participate in lawn games and other recreational activities as a way to build relationships and uplift the community. Because of this, the Franklin Fair is one of the most anticipated community events for Marietta PAL and its mentoring program since the event began as the Franklin Field Day in 2012.

Marietta PAL continues to run regular programming in the Lawrence Street Recreation Center, which in 2012, the Marietta City Council agreed to provide Marietta PAL full access to and has afforded them space to expand the program and serve more youth throughout the year. With the continued support of the Marietta City Council, YELLS and all of Marietta PAL’s supporters, Lieutenant Goins and his team hope to continue to shine light on the youth and the community that they serve by utilizing sports and mentoring as the basis for the positive interaction between youth and police officers in Marietta, GA.
Danbury Police Activities League (PAL) in Danbury, CT was founded in 1965 with the goal of providing youth with a safe and healthy alternative to drugs, violence and crime. Since 1965, Danbury PAL has served over 1,000 youth through more than 18 different programs, including recreational sports, such as field hockey, basketball and softball. Danbury PAL also takes pride in their long-standing women’s basketball program, which includes over 140 2nd to 8th grade-aged youth, a summer experience during 9 weeks of the summer and open gym two nights a week.

During this time, Danbury PAL has received generous support from the City of Danbury, as it is independently run and governed by its Board of Directors and much of the daily operations have been made possible through support of the community and dedicated volunteers. In the spring of 2015, Danbury PAL conducted a community needs survey to identify and highlight opportunities and challenges for the Chapter to address with the goal to develop and implement a strategic plan that the Chapter could rely on to respond to the community as well as fill gaps in their existing programming. As a result of the survey, the main focus for the strategic plan became the need to incorporate more mentoring as a part of regular programming.

Knowing that mentoring is a large part of National PAL’s focus, Danbury PAL saw no better opportunity to nationally affiliate their Chapter with National PAL. With that, National PAL is pleased to welcome Danbury PAL to the NPAL family and is looking forward to growing our relationship and providing opportunities for Danbury PAL to incorporate mentoring into their programs and establish more police involvement to better the interactions between the Danbury Police Department and the community they serve. Danbury PAL Executive Director, Melissa Freck, is optimistic about this opportunity as she and Danbury Police Chief, Patrick Redenhour, who serves on the Board of Directors, hope to shift their focuses and become more involved with National PAL to be able to continue to bridge the gap between kids, cops and community in Danbury, Connecticut.

“With becoming a National PAL Chapter, we are excited to include mentoring into our successful existing programs as a means of following through on our strategic plan and community survey findings.”

- Melissa Freck, Executive Director, Danbury PAL
Youth and Law Enforcement Inspirational Awardees

DECEMBER 2019:

YOUTH OF THE MONTH

Laura Guzman
Oxnard PAL
Oxnard, CA

Laura Guzman is a dedicated Oxnard PAL Youth Leaders Council President. While accumulating 400+ hours of community service, Guzman has led several initiatives at her Chapter, including feeding the homeless, holiday toy drives, and hosting community Thanksgiving dinners. She is also a dedicated athlete and currently participates in swim team, water polo, and boxing. While balancing her impressive 3.8 GPA, Guzman always finds time to tutor and mentor fellow PAL youth.

LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER OF THE MONTH

Officer John Suitt
Durham PD
Durham, NC

Within his many duties as an officer of the Durham, NC Police Department, Officer Suitt serves as a mentor for the Durham PAL golf, baseball, Police Explorers and SRO Camp programs. Officer Suitt also coordinates the Durham PAL basketball program by hosting tournaments, tutoring and planning cultural field trips to improve athletic, academic, and social skills. More remarkably, Officer Suitt has taken the time to reach out to parents and guardians of each mentee to individually learn more about the youth he mentors and create a program that meets their specific needs.

VOLUNTEER OF THE MONTH

Edward Buruchain
Vernon Township PAL
Vernon Township, NJ

For over 38 years, Edward Buruchian was instrumental in the founding and growth of the Vernon Township PAL until the point where he physically was unable to get to the Chapter. As an active Vice President, Board of Trustee Member and Head of Engineering, he treated Vernon Township PAL as his second home. Despite his battle with cancer, Edward selflessly prioritized the needs of PAL above his own ailment. He remained a dutiful volunteer until his passing in October of 2019. You are greatly missed by all those at PAL and thank you for your years of dedication, Edward.

ALUMNI OF THE MONTH

Veronica Diaz
Waterbury PAL
Waterbury, CT

Veronica Diaz is the embodiment of a PAL proud and produced alum. At seven years old, Diaz joined Waterbury PAL and immediately participated in athletic events as well as a plethora of charitable initiatives, including the Connecticut Special Events. Waterbury PAL introduced her beloved sport of golf to her in their “First Tee of CT” golf program. Today, she is First Tee of CT’s Assistant Coach and has mentored youth within the program for the last five years. While pursuing her undergraduate bachelor’s degree, Diaz often returns to her beloved PAL to teach and mentor.
Youth and Law Enforcement Inspirational Awardees

For additional Inspirational Awardee, click here.

JANUARY 2020:

**YOUTH OF THE MONTH**

**Jason Basant**
*Waterbury PAL*
*Waterbury, CT*

Jason Basant first joined PAL when he was accepted into WPAL’s PAL/TAFT Summer Enrichment Program as a result of his astounding academic achievements. Basant volunteers in WPAL’s Special Olympics Unified Sports Program, where he partners with special needs youth to participate in sporting activities. He also participates in initiatives including toy drives, school supply drives, and community clean-up projects. Through his interactions with youth and community members, Basant has made a lasting impact in his community.

**LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER OF THE MONTH**

**Officer Chris Holms**
*Norwalk PD*
*Norwalk, CT*

Officer Chris Holms of the Norwalk Police Department has devoted the last 10 years to establishing programs at the Norwalk PAL. Holms increased involvement of the Chapter’s PAL DARE Summer Camp participants, and established the PAL Police Explorer Post. Holms partnered Fire Department personnel with the Police Explorer POST to create the Public Safety Cadet Program, where youth learn leadership, discipline and teamwork. Holms has assumed leadership over the Cadet Academy to ensure that the program provides a safe, enriching learning environment.

**VOLUNTEER OF THE MONTH**

**Stevie Harrison**
*Aiken DPS PAL*
*Aiken, SC*

Stevie Harrison has been a reliable Aiken (SC) Department of Public Safety PAL member for the last two years. While balancing his full-time employment, he serves as Aiken’s head football, track and basketball coach. Harrison has become a beloved volunteer because he constantly provides support and service to the Chapter’s families. Harrison often goes out of his way to provide essentials to families that may not have the means to do so. His ability to relate to Aiken’s youth has motivated youth to not only excel in their sport of interest, but also in their academic studies.

National PAL’s monthly Inspirational Awards recognize individuals in the NPAL network who inspire their colleagues and friends and are steadfast in their service to their communities.

Please visit our website at [www.nationalpal.org](http://www.nationalpal.org) to submit your nomination.
76th Annual Training and Conference

National PAL Chapters will soon gather for the 76th Annual Training and Conference in New Orleans, LA from April 13-17, 2020. Situated in the French Quarter and close to the Central Business District, the New Orleans Marriott is perfectly positioned for one of the best National PAL conferences to date. With style, substance and unparalleled service, this year’s conference hotel is nestled on NOLA’s famed Canal Street with some of the rooms offering remarkable views of the Mississippi River and downtown New Orleans.

Each year the National PAL team and the National Conference Planning Committee aim to provide a superior conference with valuable workshops and quality activities. This year, prepare to add an authentic New Orleans experience complete with a few surprises. The first full day of the conference kicks off with a continental breakfast followed by the return of the Vendor Village - a place where Chapters gather to meet exhibitors to learn more about the products that will enhance the quality of programming and operations of PAL Chapters. Jeff Hood, National PAL CEO, and Barbara Bonilla, National PAL Board Chair, will present the Opening Convocation Welcome along with various esteemed New Orleans guests. The remainder of the day will bring a wealth of training and development sessions in the areas of strategic planning, financial management, volunteer management and more.

Also returning is the annual community service event - our chance to demonstrate how National PAL Cares about the community. Last year, the residents of Skid Row joined us for an old fashioned cookout and received fresh pairs of socks to warm their feet. Shoes and socks are reported to be one of the top five items requested by the homeless and those in need. Knowing this, National PAL members will give each person a complimentary pair of socks and shoes after offering a free foot bath.

Another highly anticipated event is the 2020 Annual Gala and Awards Presentation. This formal affair provides the chance to look back at the previous year’s success and accomplishments of our PALs throughout the organization. During this event, National PAL also announces the Inspirational Award of the Year recipients which are given to one youth, law enforcement officer, alumni and volunteer who embodies the spirit and mission of National PAL. To register or for additional information, please visit www.nationalpal.org.