

Matching Big and Little

*Big Brothers
Big Sisters
are there
when youth
need them*

By Lori Russell

As a coordinator for Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Columbia Gorge, Monte Dickinson has met with dozens of boys and girls looking for an adult mentor—someone to take them fishing or to teach them to bake cookies, to make paper airplanes or paper dolls.

“I always begin by having the child fill out an interest list,” Monte says.

She uses the list to match the potential little brother or sister with an adult with similar interests.

Monte did not have to look far to find the right “big” for Brandon “Bubba” Adams of Dufur, a then 7-year-old whose interests included learning how to identify animal tracks and using binoculars to watch birds and wildlife.

Monte’s husband, Don “Dub” Dickinson, had learned to read animal tracks while growing up on a game farm in Eastern Oregon.

A pair of binoculars sits on every end table in the

Dickinsons’ living room—ever at the ready in case of a bird or wildlife sighting on their Rowena property.

Soon after his meeting with Monte, Bubba was introduced to his new big for the first time.

Dub taught him to skip rocks and fly kites, as well as read tracks. They held contests to determine which paper airplane flew the furthest when launched from a ladder.

Later, they ventured to Sorosis Park to toss a baseball and fly an electric model airplane.

“We also hold the longest record of catching no fish,” says Dub.

Whenever they piled in the car for an outing, Bubba rode shotgun with a pair of binoculars.

“Time and consistency are very important in establishing a big/little relationship,” says Dub.

Like all of the adult mentors in the program, Dub committed to spend two hours a week with Bubba for at least a year.

“Two hours a week is a big deal for kids,” he says. “A lot of them are hungry for adult contact. A big is one more person in their life who believes in them, one more person outside the family to talk to.”

Adults who spend time with kids discover that the really important conversations often occur during the simple activities of life, such as tying a fishing lure or slurping an ice cream cone.

Input from a trusted adult can act like a pair of binoculars, offering a child a glimpse of the larger world beyond their own experience.

Dub remembers asking Bubba what he wanted to be when he grew up. The boy replied, “a service station man.” The next time they got together, Dub gave Bubba an Oregon State University T-shirt.

Since then, he not only is thinking about attending college, but has come to share the Dickinsons’ passion for the Beavers and often accompanies them to football games.

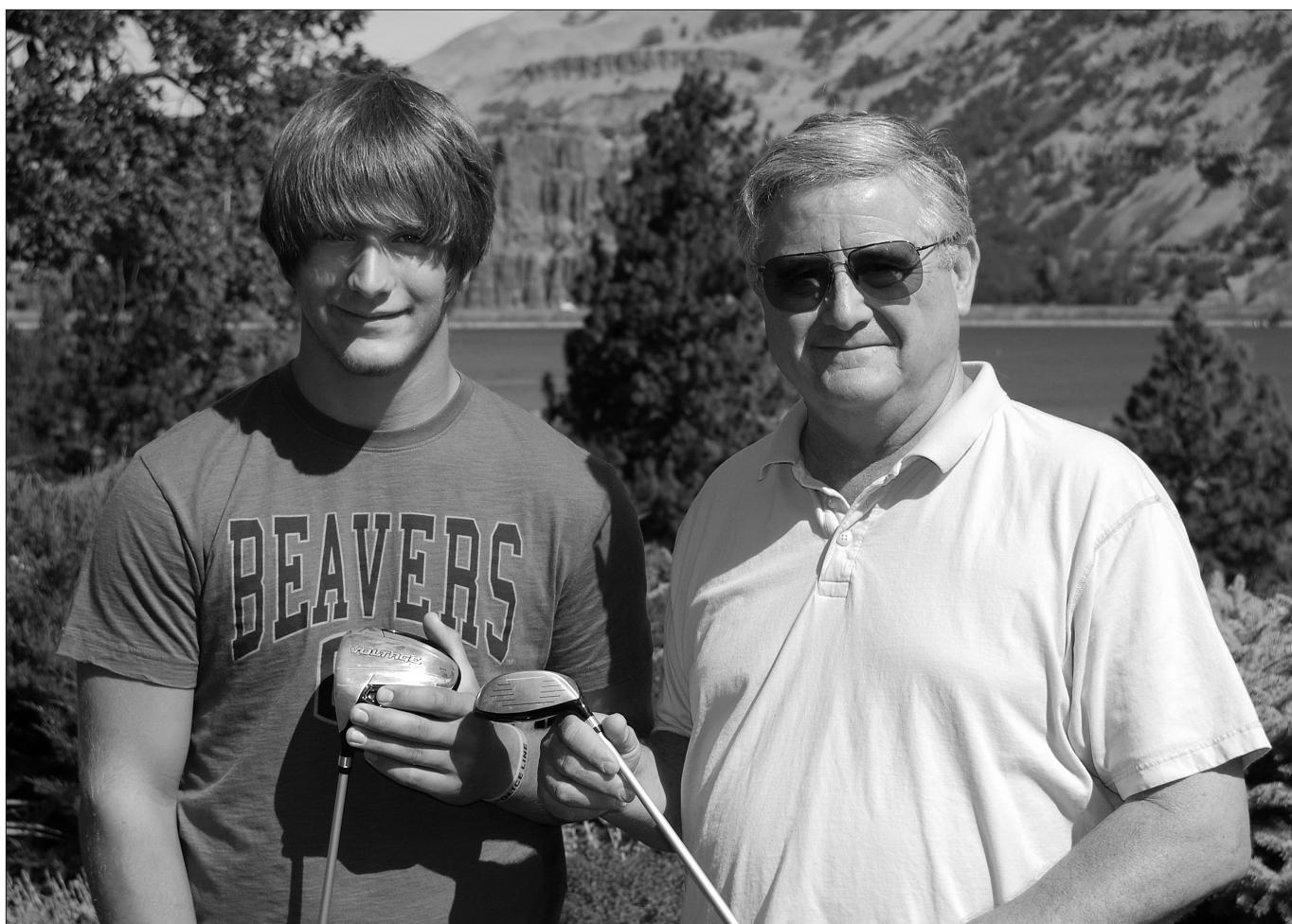
During the past seven years, Dub and Monte have come to consider Bubba a member of their family.

“It rapidly expands beyond the two of you,” says Dub.

With his encouragement, Bubba earned his boating license and now captains the Dickinsons’ pontoon boat during their trips on the Columbia.



Bubba’s interest in learning to use binoculars was one of the early clues that he and Dub Dickinson would make a good match. A pair of binoculars sits in the Dickinsons’ living room overlooking the Columbia River.



Dub and Bubba also traveled with members of the local Episcopal church on a mission trip to Haiti.

For bigs and littles, friendship means sharing both good times and bad. Last year as a freshman at Dufur High School, Bubba sustained a football injury that resulted in a traumatic brain injury and fractured vertebrae in his neck.

The injury and lengthy recovery forced him to miss his first quarter of classes and left him unable to compete in the contact sports he loves.

With the support of family and friends—including the Dickinsons—Bubba is looking to the future, rather than the past. Now 15, the high school sophomore has taken up golf.

Dub tags along for his lessons, and a good-natured competition between the two plays out on the links. There is also hunting, camping and Frisbee golf.

“If I hadn’t been injured I wouldn’t have discovered what else there is to try,” Bubba says.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is a program of Next Door Inc., a nonprofit organization that helps children, teens and families in the region. The group

serves about 75 pairs of bigs and littles from Wasco, Hood River and Klickitat counties.

In addition to the one-on-one time the children and their mentors spend together, the organization coordinates quarterly group activities, including windsurfing lessons and trips to OMSI, the Oregon Zoo and Mount Hood Adventure Park.

“Sometimes it is hard to tell who gets the most out of the program,” says Dub. “There are bigs who get more tickled pink than their littles.”

Every potential big brother or sister must complete an application, screening and background check prior to joining the program. Male volunteers are especially needed, as there is usually a waiting list of boys waiting for a match.

Bubba says he has met several other kids through the years who have benefited from the bigs in their lives.

“If I hadn’t met Dub, I wouldn’t have met so many people,” he says. “I wouldn’t have this family.” ■

For more information about BBBS of the Columbia Gorge, call Next Door Inc. at (541) 386-6665 or go to their website at www.nextdoorinc.org.

Bubba Adams, left, and his Big Brother Dub Dickinson prepare to tackle another adventure: golf.