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Lifestyle

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Scott Jr.**
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SEPTEMBER 2009
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\$3.50 US



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businesses funding lessons

By Pam Parker



NICK SCOTT JR. doesn't have a degree in education, but he is a passionate leader in reaching out to our littlest students from birth to age 8.

As the vice president of Scott Enterprises, he is a third-generation owner of a family-owned hospitality network that represents five restaurant chains, eight hotel chains, a privately owned water park, conference center and restaurant.

NICK SCOTT JR. WITH HIS CHILDREN, FROM LEFT, ZACH, 4, NICK, 8, KATIE, 2, AND WILL, 6. *Photo by Greg Wohlford/Erie Times-News*

inset: NICK SCOTT JR. AND HIS FATHER, NICK SCOTT SR., SHARE GIFTS DURING THE SHRINERS HOSPITAL DAY IN 2008. Photo courtesy of Scott Enterprises

A few months ago, after one eye-opening lesson at a state conference on education, he became an outspoken advocate for early childhood education, really early education.

"I learned that 90 percent of the brain is developed by the age of 5," Scott says. "I have four children ages 2,4,6,8, so it hit home."



MARLENE MOSCO (CENTER BACK) WITH CHILDREN DURING PRESENTATION OF \$100,000 PNC FOUNDATION GRANT FOR SCIENCE OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM AT TOM RIDGE ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER. Photo courtesy of PNC Bank

Nancy Kalista sent Scott to the education summit in Harrisburg. Kalista, the executive director of Early Connections in Erie County, lives the importance of educating youngsters before they hit kindergarten. She appointed Scott to her Leadership Cabinet for Success By 6, a program that focuses on areas of significant impact on a child's ability to learn with special attention to education, health care, child abuse and neglect, children's mental health, and children with special needs.

The Success By 6 program started in 2004 and now includes more than 300 professionals and parents who volunteer time and expertise to promote the education of youngsters. Scott is one of those professionals.

"Nick was so eloquent," Kalista says. "He told us about how it affected him. Nick reinforced the importance of education for children to learn, grow to their potential, and contribute to business and society."

Scott agrees and added that children are his company's future supervisors, managers and directors.

"The key to success in our business is not the bricks and mortar or the franchise partners we choose. It is our people. Our team of 1,500 make or break the future growth of our company. We have a lot invested in this

community and its future is very important to us. That is why I am helping to raise awareness of the importance of early childcare and education."

Scott Enterprises supports children, families and adults through the United Way of Erie County; Shriners Hospitals for Children;

Erie City Mission; March of Dimes; American Red Cross; Highmark Caring Place; Big Brothers, Big Sisters; Make a Wish Foundation; Erie Philharmonic; Juvenile Diabetes;

Businesses Pony Up Funds And Programs

Businesses are trying to fill in the gaps that government funding is creating: One example is the PNC Grow Up Great initiative started in 2004. The 10-year, \$100 million investment prepares children from birth to age 5 for success in school and life. So far, Marlene Mosco, regional president, says PNC has invested \$15 million in grants for programs that support early childhood education and innovative preschool projects.

"The issue of early education and school readiness was selected by PNC employees as the company's corporate initiative," she says.

In northwestern Pa., PNC invests in education with funding and with its own

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— Nancy Kalista

Neighborhood Art House, Tom Ridge Environmental Center; the Ophelia Project, Childrens Miracle Network; American Heart Association; and Habitat for Humanity, to name a few.

Kalista pointed out that reaching out to children from birth through age eight means reaching out to parents, families and primary caregivers, and Scott is just one of many business owners making a commitment to early education. Joyce Ann Miller, chief executive officer of Northwest Institute of Research, sees many businesses making contact.

"The research shows that preschoolers need our attention," says Joyce Ann Miller. "We need more private businesses to step in because government funding only goes so far."

Miller works with the Northwest Regional Key, which receives state funding to improve the quality of early care and education. She has headed countless studies that reflect the importance of early childhood education and its influence on success in school and later in life.

"It's very important that we build a culture of learning at an early age and that we build in a proficiency of reading," she says.

employees who can donate 40 hours of PNC-paid time to volunteer at 23 preschools and day care centers. In addition, PNC funded a two-year, \$100,000 science grant at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center to create a Science Outside The Classroom program.

PNC funds 14 regional science centers and nonprofit education centers in seven states and the District of Columbia. Other PNC programs include providing books, financial literacy, playground cleanups and PNC readers in classrooms. PNC also sponsored "Kids Week" at the Chautauqua Institution and the PNC Foundation has provided major funding to Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit educational organization behind Sesame Street. The funding supports numerous teaching concepts that make learning fun. And, PNC offers some programs in English, Mandarin Chinese and Spanish. An inflatable, mobile dome with a planetarium show is just one of the ideas that resulted from the partnership between with Sesame Workshop.

The efforts are impressive to Nick Scott, Jr. "If we focus on early childhood development we give children a fighting chance and we can break that threat of generational poverty," he says. "Programs exist that are changing the lives of children everyday. Unfortunately, they

business & commerce



NANCY KALISTA, CENTER, DURING A VISIT BY HARRIET DICHTER, DEPUTY SECRETARY OF THE OFFICE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND EARLY LEARNING (RIGHT OF KALISTA). ALSO PICTURED ARE BILL JACKSON, COO OF THE UNITED WAY OF ERIE COUNTY, SUE MOORHEAD OF PRE-K COUNTS AND JODI ASKINS. *Photo by Pam Parker*

are underfunded and at risk as government budgets get slashed. We should not be so short sighted. We all need to help.”

Helping The Helpers

Miller adds that accessibility to affordable toddler education is one of the many needs yet to be filled. In some cases, preschools and day care centers are full. More caregivers are needed and they need support.

“The goal is to educate our early childhood caregivers and give them more to work with,” she says. “The sad thing is most of our child care workers are making minimum wage, and that’s backward. These caregivers are a vital influence on our children at a very young age. We need to help them out.”

Miller says a state-funded program supports training for early childhood caregivers to earn credentials.

Armed with credentials, caregivers can impact learning, but they could still use some help to run their businesses, Miller says. She added that companies are getting involved and donating computers and business management time to child care facilities.

Miller says there’s much more than success of the children at stake.

“It’s important to business owners that their employees have quality child care,” she says. “As parents, if we know our babies and toddlers are getting everything they need in a nurturing environment with certified caregivers, we can relax while we are in the workplace. It takes the stress off us during work hours.”

Nick Scott is dedicating a lot of his company’s efforts to early childcare and education, and he knows it will take time to make a change. His company is still learning what it can do.

“We have applied for the tax credits, but since the government keeps slashing that program, we may not get involved this year,” he says. “All of this is rather new to our company, but we feel we can spread the word about how important this cause is to private business.”

Scott, Miller, Mosco and Kalista acknowledge change is coming, and since 2004, remarkable progress has been made. With the help of businesses, more help is on the way to give our littlest students an early education.

“Early child care and education is not a sprint; it is a marathon,” Scott says. ■