

SARAH HESLIN

Ready to Help

By JENNA CAPTUAO

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growing up in Pine Bush, NY, Sarah Heslin was a competitive swimmer from fourth grade all the way through college. She had dreams of teaching third grade and went to SUNY Oneonta for her bachelor's degree in elementary education.

Sarah is tall. She reached her full height of 6'1 by the end of seventh grade. "And yes," she says, "If you are wondering if I ever played basketball, the answer is yes. The basketball coach, as soon as I entered high school, was after me every day for two years to try out for the basketball team. I finally tried out for the basketball team my junior year in high school and made the team! I played basketball for two years – my junior and senior year – and loved it! I wish I started at a much younger age."

While at college, she saw a tall guy walk out of a class and it was love at first sight. "I saw how tall he was and thought to myself, I need to be with him!" She dated William for a few months before she moved out to Colorado to help her sister. They stayed in touch, but William was not going to give up. "While I was out west, he said he was going to fly out to Colorado with a one-way plane ticket and drive me back to NY. I told him I would believe it when I see it," says Sarah. "Sure

enough, December 5th of 2007, he flew out to get me and we drove cross country back to NY, and we have been together ever since!"

William is originally from Schaghticoke, and they decided to stay in the area, settling in Clifton Park. They now have two children – Liam (8) and Kayleigh (7). Between Sarah's height and William's height of 6'7, they fully expect their children to be tall as well!

William now works as a Vice President Trust Officer at Bank of America Private Bank and volunteers his time at the YMCA and coaching for the Town of Clifton Park's Rec Winter Basketball program. Liam is in third grade and plays basketball through the Town Rec program. Kayleigh is in second grade and is a member of the Girl Scouts and dances with World Class Dance. Their family also includes Shelby, a 10-year-old black lab, and Jackie, their 14-year-old rescue cat.

Sarah continued to keep up with her swimming throughout college, working as

the Co-Aquatics Director at the YMCA in Oneonta. She also ran outdoor town pools on her summer breaks. But after moving to the Clifton Park area, she pursued her teaching dream and subbed at Mechanicville Elementary School and the Shenendehowa Central School District. However, teachers were being laid off at the time, so she decided to look for other job opportunities.

She turned to the YMCA for a part-time lifeguard and swim instructor position, but then found out they were also hiring for an aquatics director. With her swim background and experience running pools, she was a natural candidate and quickly got the job. "I thought I would always go back to teaching," she says, "but after my first year with the Y, I fell in love with the Y mission and helping others in need."

Sarah is now the Executive Director of the Southern Saratoga YMCA. Many people think of the Y as a gym and swim, but she is quick to point out that as a nonprofit organization, they are so much more. The YMCA is a charity that holds annual fundraisers (starting again this January) to give back to individuals in need throughout the area that focuses on Healthy Living, Youth



■ FAMILY FEATURE

Development and Social Responsibility. The YMCA does not turn anyone away due to their inability to pay. With the money raised, they help seniors on a fixed budget to get out of their homes to socialize and stay active; they help parents who have lost their jobs and assist with childcare costs; they help adult cancer survivors find their new normal through their Livestrong® at the YMCA program; they feed families in need with complete Thanksgiving meals; they shop for back-to-school clothing for over 190 children in need through their Running Start program; and they provide family fun monthly activities for families with a child who have a life-threatening illness.

Currently, the YMCA is collecting canned food items through November 11th to help serve families in need with a complete Thanksgiving meal as part of their annual Caring Community Basket Brigade program. Last year, they served over 400 Thanksgiving meals across the Capital Region, and this year they are projecting to serve over 800 families in need. 125 of these families reside right here in Clifton Park, Mechanicville, or Waterford-Halfmoon. They are in need of volunteers to help deliver the Thanksgiving baskets on Saturday, November 23rd. If you or your family are interested in helping, please email Sarah directly at sheslin@cdymca.org.

Being able to help others in need – both through the families they assist, as well as through coaching new staff – is an important part of the job for Sarah. “I love that every day I have the ability to make a difference in other people’s lives,” she says. “We scholarship individuals in need to be able to access the Y and the programs we provide. When people pour their hearts out to us



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about their financial hardships, it is great to look at them and tell them yes, we can help.”

In addition to her work at the YMCA, Sarah has also volunteered on the board for the Chamber of Southern Saratoga County for three years, with the Twin Bridges Rotary for the past four years and with the Chamber of Southern Saratoga County’s Chamber Angels program for the past five years. The Chamber Angels provide holiday cheer for families with children from infants to 18 years old that are enduring the financial hardship that can make the extra expense of the holidays a cause for stress and unhappiness in what should be a season of joy. They serve over 400 children every year in Saratoga County, providing the holiday gifts for these children in need. Partnering with other nonprofit organizations like CAPTAIN, the YMCA, and the Mechanicville and Franklin Community Centers, they have been able to serve over 2,000 children.

The Angels are currently looking for more sponsors for the children. Individual community members or businesses can sponsor a child (spending on average about \$150), or they are also in need of individual wish list items.

When not helping out the community, Sarah loves spending time with her family and going for a walk. She hopes for health and happiness for her family in the upcoming year as she strives everyday to live up to her favorite quote by P.T. Barnum – “The noblest art is that of making others happy.”

If you are interested in helping the YMCA or would like to volunteer at the Y, please reach out to Sarah at sheslin@cdymca.org.

If you are interested in sponsoring or shopping for a child through the Chamber Angels program this holiday season, please contact the Southern Saratoga Chamber at 518-371-7748. ■

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