

# Preserving childhood through sports

By KENNETH R. CERINI

**W**hen a family is going through difficult financial times, it is often the children who suffer most. In addition to having to leave their childhoods at the front door, they may also be forced to forego their greatest pleasures, such as sports. Thankfully, the Childrens Sport Connection recognizes this all-too-frequent occurrence and has been working full-force to address the needs of these children.

"We reach out to those families where, maybe things were great yesterday, but suddenly today they're in a completely different position financially," said Patricia D'Accolti, founder and president. "We act as the bridge, before and after, to ensure that the child doesn't lose out on their childhood."

**How was Childrens Sport Connection conceived?** I founded CSC from my own personal knowledge that when a family is struggling financially, extracurricular activities are the first things that go. I am the mother of children who had been playing travel ice hockey for years (a very costly sport). I went through a divorce and suddenly had an extremely difficult time gathering the resources for them to remain active players. I thought to myself, "There has got to be other situations like mine." Thus, Childrens Sport Connection was born. What we do is provide funding and sports equipment to children whose families are in financial crisis. We run equipment drives in the community, donate new or gently used equipment to those in need and provide grants to those organizations and children who could not otherwise participate. Initially, we ran strict-

ly via word of mouth, but as word spread, I've been able to make some really great relationships and continuously obtain unbelievable support from the community.

**In what ways have Long Islanders shown their support?** There have been endless equipment drives run for us through numerous community members, including school districts, businesses, organizations, local politicians and townships, the New York Islanders and even young people looking to do community service. The Long Island Ducks have given us support, as well, and A-1 Viking Moving and Storage has donated storage facilities and transportation for it all. We receive truckloads of equipment to give on a continual basis, serving kids all over the Island. In fact, we've also been able to connect with communities outside of the Island, reaching out to those in Rockland County, New Jersey and as far as Massachusetts. We recently partnered with Farrell Fritz to work with the Hempstead P.A.L. (Police Activity League), who was in need of some karate equipment. In this case, and in most others, they're giving something tangible, so it's a great feeling for a corporation to actually see the results and how they made a difference.

**What would you consider to be the ultimate goal of the organization?** While I would love to hear in 10 years that one of the kids who received a grant or equipment from us became a professional athlete, that's not the story we're aiming to hear. However, when a child is coping with a burden at home and facing drugs, violence or the potential for crime and, instead,



*Patricia D'Accolti is founder and president of Children's Sport Connection.*

chooses to invest time in a sport, leading them to go forward with their education and become productive in society, that is the real success story; that's what we aspire to achieve. When it comes down to it, sports provide more than just exercise, skills and competition – they are community-based and positive, for both the children and their families. Sometimes, no matter what's going on at home, a simple pat on the back from a coach or a teammate can be all a child needs to know that "things will be okay."

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**Founded:** 2005

**Paid staff:** 0

**Annual budget:** \$40,000

**Fund-raised budget:** \$40,000

**Program Services:** 90 percent