

# Upfront

I find myself at the confluence of three significant events. These are they.

First – the ask.

Horizons Savannah is a not-for-profit organization with a clear mission: We partner with youth, their families, and the community to enrich the lives of students through the joy of learning, while developing the skills for success and inspiration to reach their dreams. The program features time-and-research-tested components that differentiate it from other educational interventions. At its core: Six weeks of full-day classroom instruction, recreational activities, cultural exploration, and relationship-building.

For a while, I was chair of the Horizons Savannah's board, humbly succeeding long-time Skidaway resident, Tom Oxnard, in the role. Now, I am a middle school English teacher in the program, so I have witnessed the work (and the magic) from different points of view.

Kids come to the program from various Savannah public schools. While they face common socioeconomic challenges, they also share the basic human desires for connection, growth, and fun. Horizons kids are eligible to join the program as kindergartners and can remain (the vast majority do) year-after-year through high school graduation. Many return to the program after their high school years to work as volunteers or professional teachers as young adults.

Horizons operates at the generous invitation of local independent host schools – Savannah Country Day, Bethesda Academy, and Savannah Christian. Horizons students enjoy the resources that these institutions provide as program sites. Young people from host schools volunteer as classroom and activity assistants. Horizons brings people to-

gether from disparate circumstances who might never otherwise meet. These connections demystify perceived differences and create valuable lifetime bonds.

Horizons teaches kids to swim. Swimming is both a survival skill and an esteem-building activity, especially for kids who have never dipped a toe in water before. Horizons fields a swim team in the local league, another way to connect families from different backgrounds with one another.

The program works. Horizons kids' reading and math standardized test scores, measured at the beginning and end of the summer session, significantly improve, in stark contrast to many of their non-Horizons peers.

As a teacher, I have celebrated little wins (a hesitant kid suddenly blossoms as she reads aloud to the class), and I lament the challenges ("Put your phone away; you're wasting your time and you're wasting mine"). It's an incredible privilege to have a chance to positively impact a kid.

Horizons Savannah depends on people like you. We employ professional teachers and limit teacher/student ratios to 15:1. We feed our kids – breakfast, lunch, and snacks – ever day. We transport them using contracted buses. We operate all day, five days a week, for six weeks in summer, and we supplement the core session with ongoing engagement throughout the school year. We take five field trips. We offer a variety of clubs. And we

do it all for a cost of approximately \$2,000 per student for the entire year. This summer, we will welcome approximately 300 students, while more than 100 remain on our waiting list. Our capacity is limited only by our ability to fundraise.

Horizons Giving Day is our single most-important fundraising initiative each year. "Day" is misleading. The actual day is May 15, but the campaign spans the entire month of May and beyond. It's open now.

I have studied many social impact groups – I am confident Horizons is among the very best (and offers the greatest return on your

investment). Email me directly, [slauretti@theskinnie.com](mailto:slauretti@theskinnie.com) or visit my giving day page at [www.horizonsgivingday.org/campaigns/scottlauretti](http://www.horizonsgivingday.org/campaigns/scottlauretti).

Thank you for your consideration.

\* \* \*

This is an excerpt from this column published a year ago. Now, the referenced wedding is upon us – a few days from now...

*My daughter bought a wedding dress. I haven't seen it, but I hear it's nice. I'm biased, but she'd look great in a trash bag. Even so, I'm sure she will dazzle in this garment (I would say "gown," but these things come in two pieces nowadays, I'm told).*

I started writing this column in 2003. The daughter with the dress was 6 – "almost 7," as she probably would have said. Once, the obsession with "the dress" was completely foreign to me. What's all the fuss? It's just a collection of white fabric. You wear it once. You could pay a mortgage for a year with what some of them cost. (If the dress pays a year's worth of mortgage obligations, the reception buys the whole house!) But I think I get it now. It's more than wearable indulgence. It's a marker on the side of life's long road. It's a monument that will forever stand to that single moment in time that connects what was with what will be. It's white, because life can be messy, and paint will be spilled. There's plenty of time for color, but not on that day when things are perfectly clean.

I haven't seen it yet. I don't want to see it. Not until Saturday. Not until it's time, just before its time has passed.

\* \* \*

Mother's Day is coming. It will have passed before the issue following this one arrives. That's my mom on the cover, with me. She is holding me, as she has always held me, metaphorically and for real. In the photo, she is both protecting and teaching me. She is keeping me safe and trying to give me some basic tools to take care of myself when the time comes. That's what moms do, like nobody else can.

*Scott A. Lauretti*

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