



Inside: A Look Back at the 20 Year
Legacy of Shawn Jeffers' Leadership



The | Tapestry

Spring 2023 | Inside: A Look Back at Shawn Jeffers' Legacy | Introducing Little City's New CEO



A Note From Our Board President



Dear Little City Family and Friends,

Little City is embarking on a new chapter.

For the last 20 years, Little City has been blessed to have the leadership, vision and care of Executive Director Shawn Jeffers. During that time, Little City has seen unprecedented growth. Whether it was the launch of a therapeutic day school and children's village or expansion of programs and services for everyone from adults to foster children, every corner of Little City is better because of Shawn's leadership.

I had the privilege of first working with Shawn during the 2016 merger with Countryside Association where I served on the Board of Directors. That experience showed me how change can make us stronger. Seven years later, Little City is reaching more people than ever and those families and participants from Countryside Association are in new and improved locations benefitting from access to more robust and diverse programming and more resources than ever before.

Now that Little City is on the precipice of another significant change, I am just as confident the opportunity to once again grow stronger is ahead of us.

In this *Tapestry*, you can read about Shawn's incredible legacy and accomplishments and how he has helped lay the foundation for Little City's growth and success for decades to come. And just as important, you can read about the person who will help Little City reach that potential – newly appointed Chief Executive Officer, Marie Newman.

It has been an honor and privilege to be part of the search process for Little City's new leader and interviewing incredible people with a passion for our mission. Marie immediately stood out to all

of us as someone with the skillset, vision and, most importantly, sincere passion to help build a better future for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

As a former congresswoman and executive in nonprofit and private sectors, Marie has the professional experience and skills to connect with people and create grassroot movements to strengthen and expand Little City's mission. Through her own volunteer work at Little City and seeing the services her cousins received in our programs, her passion for Little City was evident immediately. We can't wait for all our families, participants, staff and supporters to get to know her in these coming months.

On behalf of all the members of Little City's Board of Directors, I want to thank all of our families and supporters for their trust and patience during this important transition.

Change is coming, but as we've seen and experienced in the past, change is what makes Little City stronger.

Sincerely,

Greg Burns
Little City Board President

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A Look Back at the 20 Year Legacy of Shawn Jeffers



It was almost over before it ever started for Shawn Jeffers.

Thirty years of experience in the health and human services field had prepared him for the greatest of challenges. As someone who was born and raised in Chicago, taking on the Executive Director role of Little City in the Chicagoland area seemed like a perfect fit at the perfect time. But the initial meeting didn't go as expected. Whether it was a test or something was just off about the fit, Shawn recalls the initial interview being a tough day.

So, he entered a verbal agreement with another agency and was ready to take his career on a path that did not include Little City. That's when then-Board President Alex Alexandrou made a phone call.

"He asked me to reconsider and it turned out Little City did very much want me," Shawn said. "It was the strength of his ask that was so convincing. But he said things at Little City were worse than they expected financially and if I wanted to withdraw my name, they would understand."

The challenge only made Shawn want the opportunity more. People like Alex who had a brother at Little City and other leaders like Verne Carson and Dorothy Rose immediately helped Shawn see Little City as a family. That approach helped Shawn form the vision for how Little City would get out of the hole it was in, and it became a team effort from day one.

"I was invigorated by the challenge and good things began to happen," Shawn said. "Everyone had skin in the game. Whether it was board members like Alex or employees like our CFO Linda [LaPorte], so many people had loved ones who depended on Little City. I know it is cliché but when I came on, I wanted Little City to be like a family because that is what it truly was. Failure was not an option. We had to succeed."

And so, Shawn's work began.

"WE WOULD FOLLOW HIM ANYWHERE."

Thanks to some well-timed grants and unexpected donations, Little City started to see a light at the end of the tunnel in Shawn's first few months. The financial crisis was no longer near fatal

for the agency, but difficult cuts were still expected.

An outside consultant came to a conclusion no one was excited to hear: either cut children's programming or cut adult programming, as Little City could not viably do both. It was a tough choice but serious consideration had to be made. Shawn said at one point – even if only as a last-ditch effort – the idea to sell the 56-acre Palatine campus was on the table.

"It was like being asked which hand you want to cut off," Shawn said. "I could not fathom how we would dismantle either. Aside from economics, we knew the campus was a transformational place for people with developmental disabilities. So, how do we put it to the best use?"

Instead of cutting anything, Shawn and his leadership team were bold enough to do the opposite and expand. There would be a chief program officer for adults and a chief program officer for children. And most importantly, the campus would be revived.

No family can fully appreciate the night and day transformation of the campus under Shawn's leadership more than the Rose family. Jerry Rose was one of the earliest Little City residents and got to experience the school as a child and horticulture center as an adult. When Shawn arrived, Little City had no school and the horticulture center had turned into a storage facility.

Shawn promised Jerry's mother, Dorothy, that the horticulture center would reopen. Not only is the horticulture center re-opened and thriving with roughly 100 participants, annual plant sales and a growing vocational program, it was re-named the Dorothy Rose Horticulture Center in her honor.

And while Jerry was able to enjoy a specialized education on Little City's campus, many children who needed that support could no longer find it. That changed in 2011 when the ChildBridge Center for Education re-opened and has now become one of the only therapeutic day schools in the entire state to support students with the highest intensity needs.

None of these milestone accomplishments and huge turnarounds came as a surprise to Jerry's sister, Andrea Hockfield, who knew from the moment she met Shawn that he was special.

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“He was so charismatic, sincere and inspiring, we would’ve followed him anywhere,” Andrea said. “Shawn has been a godsend for Little City. Before he came, Little City never had that personal connection. You would never see an executive director walking around talking to the residents on a first-name basis, knowing their favorite movies or food. Shawn has a heart of gold that shines through in everything he does and Jerry and everyone have a better life because of it.”

Andrea’s husband, Ed Hockfield, saw Shawn’s magic in the many years they worked alongside one another. According to Ed, Shawn’s belief in others and leadership never wavered.

“We were told we could never do something like the Duffey Family Children’s Village, or that the wonderful therapeutic day school would never happen, so Shawn just rolled up his sleeves and we did it anyway,” Ed said.

“Where Little City is today is a reflection of his leadership and the staff he surrounds himself with. He’s a fabulous leader and a great friend.”

“THE MOST DIFFICULT THING I EVER WENT THROUGH.”

Fresh off the major revitalization of the campus, Shawn oversaw two of the most impactful accomplishments of his 20-year career: the opening of the Duffey Family Children’s Village and the merger with Countryside Association.

While the Children’s Village was a resounding success from the start, the merger with Countryside had its share of bumps and challenges along the way. Shawn said he remembers the many hard conversations and skepticism that came with the merger, but he also clearly remembers when he was able to start to shift the perception.

“When Countryside families started to take tours of Little City, I think things started to change slowly,” Shawn said. “They didn’t see Mr. Jeffers but they saw a ‘Hey Shawn!’ from residents who know me personally and I know them. I think that was unexpected for them and seeing that relationship I have with residents started to change their minds.”

Wendy Mayfield, Director of Program Design & Evaluation for Community Day Services, was a major player in the merger as Countryside’s director of day services at the time. She said she remembers a difficult transition during that time for families, staff and even participants.

But Shawn’s leadership never wavered and Wendy could see his sincere care for everyone in moments like when he showed up to one of Countryside’s final events and sat in a dunk tank just to get involved with people who were meeting and getting to know him for the first time.

“We certainly struggled at times but Shawn is always honest, direct, and transparent with people. And he treats everyone with the same respect whether it is a donor, longtime staff member or participant,” Wendy said.

If Shawn thought the merger would be the most difficult chapter of his Little City career, that feeling did not last long. In 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic changed Shawn’s perspective forever and is what he’ll always remember as his greatest challenge.

From programs closing to uncertain funding and the health and safety of hundreds of staff at stake, Shawn said it was a whirlwind and eye-opening experience on how he viewed success.

“That was truly a test of all I thought I knew but we made it through,” Shawn said. “What I will always remember is the actions of people, especially our staff, during the toughest moments. The effort people give to make life better for others regardless of circumstance is incredible. My job was to allow heroic people to do their best work.”

THE PERFECT ENDING

From guiding the agency through tumultuous financial hardships in the early years, to revitalizing a fading campus with the re-openings of programs and schools and starting new chapters with a children’s village and mergers, Shawn’s legacy at Little City is unprecedented.

When he knew it was time to end this chapter of his life, he wasn’t quite sure, but hitting what he calls the 20-50-70 mark seemed like fate. Twenty years at Little City, 50 in the human services field and 70 in life felt like the right time to close this chapter.

“What we did, how we did it, all these defining moments – I can pause and see it all so clearly now,” Shawn said. “We did all we could do together and now Little City is on to a new chapter and I am on to a whole new book because this really feels like the perfect ending to me.”

But before he left, Shawn got what he said was the most memorable experience he thinks he will ever have from Little City. Friends, families, and staff gathered together to celebrate Shawn and honor him with a street sign named in his honor as Shawn Jeffers Way now proudly stands right outside Pine Home.

It wasn’t the naming of a street that moved him though, but the validation of what he had set out to do on that very first day 20 years ago – make Little City a family.

“To look out and see all the people I admire and love come together was just something I will always remember. I was on cloud nine,” Shawn said. “I could have dropped the microphone right there and got on a plane knowing Little City is the family I always knew it could be. I will remember that forever.”





Meet Nick: A Pillar In This Vibrant Community

When there are times of change, a steady presence can make all the difference. That presence at Little City can always be found in Nick.

As Little City embarks on a change of leadership, Nick marks a full circle moment for the outgoing Shawn Jeffers, who had Nick here to welcome him when he first came 20 years ago and now here to say farewell years later.

It was Nick who first encapsulated the spirit of Little City and showed Shawn why Little City could be such a special place when he first arrived. During an early conversation together, Nick said Little City felt like him because “they laugh at what I laugh at” and that simple observation drove home the importance of community and kind of community that was being built at Little City.

“To have a place where people feel loved and connected is truly a special thing to find,” Shawn said. “It’s not about being apart from the community, like some may have you believe, it is about building community. That’s what we do here and that is what Nick has always been such an example of.”

Despite well over 20 years at Little City, Nick’s community leadership may have never been on greater display or more important than during the past three years. As Little City struggled through the pandemic on myriad fronts, Nick remained a beacon of positivity in his community.

As a longtime resident of the SLAs on Little City’s campus, Nick took it upon himself during those uncertain times to keep everyone connected when it was easy for isolation to set in. His daily routine would often consist of calls to his mother, calls to friends and even a phone call to a staff member or two to check in on them to make sure everyone was healthy and in good spirits.

His selflessness even extended to passing on a temporary apartment when his was getting renovated so someone who needed the temporary apartment more could use it.

When you give to support this mission, you are helping strengthen a community that so many just like Nick call home. Thank you for giving generously to make Little City the special place that it is!

“He’s just so very generous,” said Adelya Kammer, Nick’s case manager. “When you meet him, he is always joking and it looks like he doesn’t take anything too seriously, but it’s easy to see how much he cares about his friends and family.”

Shawn recalled a time when Nick played a crucial role in saving the independent-living homes on campus during a personal conversation with Illinois officials. Nick explained the homes were not disconnected or isolated from the greater community, but instead an important part of the greater community.

“Nick is a special guy and really cares about Little City and everyone at Little City,” Shawn said. “I’ll always remember that conversation when he told me “they laugh at what I laugh at” and I think it will always capture the essence of what makes Little City so special.”

Nick said Little City felt like him because “they laugh at what I laugh at” and that simple observation drove home the importance of community and kind of community that was being built at Little City.

Community Partners

Thank you to the following funders for their generous grants that support the work and mission of Little City. The below referenced grants were awarded/received on or after Jan. 2023:

- Baxter Credit Union (BCU’s Charitable Giving Committee)
- Elk Grove Township
- Marvin and Kay Lichtman Foundation
- Hanover Township
- Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO)

Helping Hands

Little City extends its appreciation to the following groups and individuals for their recent volunteer work with us since Jan. 2023:

- The Little City Associate Board
- Zurich



From High School Volunteer To Philanthropic Leader



What started in 1996 as a simple high school volunteer opportunity, has turned into a lifelong passion for Tim Ward.

Tim still vividly remembers that first time volunteering, meeting residents like Jimmy who he bonded with over metal music and seeing how much of a difference donating time could truly make. That experience inspired him to become the philanthropic leader he is today.

Tim spent his professional life creating multiple successful businesses including TTSG, where he serves as President today. TTSG has become a vital corporate partner to Little City, both by helping Little City operate day-to-day through the technology services they deliver and in support of special events such as the Little City Invitational.

Tim took time to reflect on his 25+ year relationship with Little City and how important it has been in his life.

Q: How was that first experience volunteering with Little City and was it something you knew you would love right away?

Tim: It's funny because when you are a kid you are worried about school, sports, hanging out with friends and volunteering is kind of the last thing you want to do. But then you do it and it hits you. **And at a place like Little City where you are working with people with developmental and intellectual disabilities, you can see the difference you are making right there on their faces.** To still be involved with Little City is kind of a full circle moment for me having grown up right by it and going to Fremd High School right down the road.

Q: After you went to college and started your businesses, did you always know you would come back to Little City?

Tim: As an entrepreneur you always want to be philanthropic. You have all your plans but then there are some plans that are just made for you. **Some things are meant to be. With Little City, from that first moment I volunteered, that first donation, it was a wrap. I knew I was always going to be involved.**

Q: TTSG has been involved with Little City as a service provider, a sponsor for things like the Little City Invitational, was it always the plan for the company to be that involved?

Tim: The deal between Little City and TTSG really came together after a conversation with Shawn [Jeffers] and seeing if there was any way we could work together. After taking a look at how things were going, speaking to employees who used some of the technology we could offer, it became clear we could be a help. **It's been amazing to be part of setting up some of the foundation that helped with the expansion Little City has had over the years.** And the Little City Invitational has always been an important event to me and I love being part of it any way I can. Being able to sponsor the event and help it grow is fun!

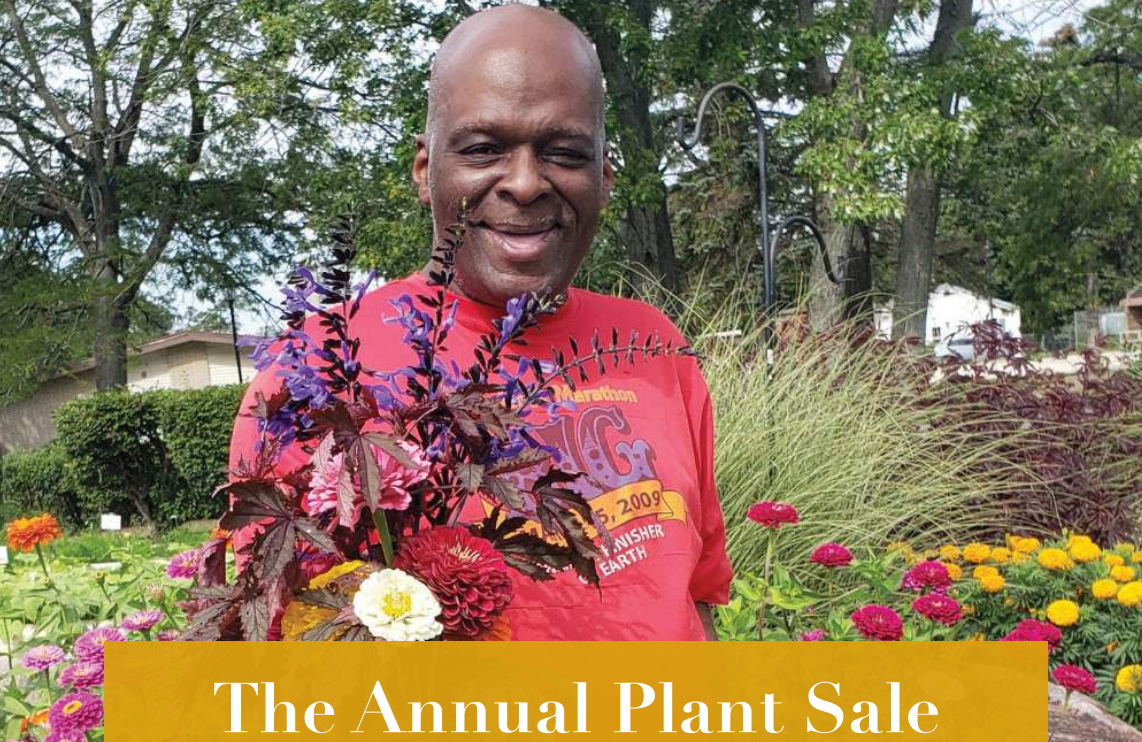
Q: You have the unique perspective of getting involved with Little City in 1996 before Shawn got here to now seeing how Little City looks as he is set to retire. How much has changed in your view?

Tim: Shawn is the best thing that ever happened to Little City. He came at a time where Little City really, really needed him and it was in some trouble. The coolest thing about running a business is seeing the growth and expansion and it is the same for 501(c)3s. The amount Little City has grown over the last 20 years from the campus to the homes is amazing. But I have worked with a lot of nonprofits and you don't see the kind of leadership that Little City has. You don't see the kind of transparency Little City has and you don't see the kind of employees Little City has. **The people here really care and that starts at the top. That's what makes Little City so special.**

PRESENTING SPONSOR FOR
THE 2023 LCI GOLF CLASSIC:



We are so thankful for friends and partners like Tim and TTSG – it is their generosity that helps move this mission for hundreds of individuals in more ways than one. Thank you for years of commitment in helping individuals with disabilities reach their unique potential always!



The Annual Plant Sale Grows More Than Flowers



Little City is set for its biggest spring plant sale yet thanks to some talented and hardworking participants.

The annual plant sale is set to start May 4th at the Dorothy Rose Horticulture Center on Little City's campus and will feature hanging baskets, vegetables, succulents, annuals and much more. But the best part of the sale is that every purchase will help people like Jeff explore, learn, and grow in the horticulture program.

Jeff has been part of Little City's horticulture program for years, but he recently became one of only four residents to be an official employee at the greenhouse. Because of increased support from grants, community partners and donors like you, Little City is able to give people like Jeff (pictured at right) and his co-workers Simone, Sharon, and Leo real work experience, pay and opportunity to grow.

"Jeff always brings a great energy with him every day and is willing to take on every job," said Jackie Kenyon, horticulture specialist. "Whether it is maintenance like sweeping and cleaning bathrooms or planting seeds and weeding, he is always wanting to help any way he can."

Along with becoming an expert gardener, Jeff has become the go-to salesman for the horticulture department. He has taken on many of the customer service responsibilities that come with running a plant sale including greeting customers with a friendly hello, helping them weigh products on a digital scale and processing their order at checkout.

His charismatic and positive personality have made him the perfect fit for the job, that has also grown to include some impromptu harmonica performances for customers.

Shop the annual plant sale starting on May 4th (just in time for Mother's Day!) at the Dorothy Rose Horticulture Center (A-Frame, 1760 W. Algonquin Road in Palatine) and help support the vocational program that individuals like Jeff are excelling in. The plant sale will have an abundance of beautiful hanging baskets, annuals, succulents, and so much more!

"He is a true character and entertainer and he is such a welcoming presence and fun person for people to be around," Jackie said. **"Adding this vocational part to the program has really helped people learn new skills and get comfortable in job settings."**

While Jeff brings the fun to his work, his job also requires serious attention. He makes the trips to Ball Seed Company with Jackie and program director Wayne Johnson to choose seeds and decide what plants to grow for the season. He, like the rest of his co-workers and program participants, is responsible for the planting, nurturing and maintenance of the many raised beds, greenhouse areas and edible garden at Little City. And Jeff helps make sure both the indoor sale area and outdoor stand are ready for customers when the plant sale starts.



"Everything people see here during the plant sale really is only possible because of our participants," Jackie said. "They all work hard and we're excited we have a few more people we have on our radar that we think are ready for the vocational side of things."

With your continued support, more participants like Jeff can have these opportunities in the horticulture program to grow their vocational skills, learn new skills, and help prepare them as they pursue community-based employment.



You are Helping Ryan Fo Full Speed Ahead

As the youngest member of Little City's Special Olympics team, Ryan has proven to be a champion athlete in record time. Having first started with the team in 2022 during the track season, Ryan proved to be a quick learner and ended up taking silver in the 100m dash and gold in the softball throw at the state championships.

Fresh off that experience, Ryan just recently helped lead the basketball team this past season as one of the leading scorers and is now taking his turn at Little City's most decorated program – the powerlifting team.

"Ryan has been trying out all our sports and is able to hang with the adults and do really well. He's the fastest runner we have," said Elideth Vazquez Martinez, recreation therapist and Special Olympics coach. "He fits in really well with our adults and is very good at making friends and being supportive of everyone."

The rare inclusion of an athlete from the children's program making it to the Special Olympics team came after his recreation therapist noticed his natural athletic ability during the weekly basketball games the boys at Larry's Home would have. After she recommended the Special Olympics and his family gave the OK, Ryan has been full speed ahead.

His maturity off the field has helped him integrate quickly as well, Elideth said. He will bring water bottles to practice for others, help teammates where he can and is always quick to help with more responsibilities.

"I would love for more of our children to be able to participate in the Special Olympics," Ellie said. "We have developmental programs where they can get involved with the sport and not have to compete right away so I hope to see more of that in the future."

Ryan and the rest of the team will have an April regional competition to see who qualifies for the state competition at the Summer Games on June 9 in Track and Field, Bocce and Powerlifting.

Interested in volunteering with our Special Olympics teams or know someone who is? Connect with Elideth to learn more about the program and how you can get involved at evazquezmartinez@littletcity.org.

Upcoming Events

60TH ANNUAL LITTLE CITY INVITATIONAL GOLF CLASSIC Monday, June 19, 2023 | Twin Orchard Country Club | Long Grove, IL



Join us for one of the signature charity events of the summer, the Little City Invitational Golf Classic!

Come out to Twin Orchard Country Club in Long Grove for a day of golf while assisting Little City in raising much-needed awareness and funds for children and adults with autism and other intellectual and developmental disabilities.

And as a part of the special event, we will be honoring **Housh Khoshbin** for his generous partnership in helping build this mission into what it is today!

Register your foursome and learn more about sponsorship opportunities today at www.LittleCity.org/LCI

POKER TOURNAMENT & CASINO NIGHT Friday, Sept. 22, 2023 | Bank of America Tower | 110 North Wacker, Chicago

Save the date for our next Poker Tournament & Casino Night! Hosted at the Bank of America Tower in the heart of Chicago, it'll be an exciting night filled with Texas Hold 'Em and casino games with incredible prizes at stake and a gourmet buffet from Gibson's! More details coming soon!

4TH ANNUAL LITTLE CITY HERO WALK Saturday, Sept. 30, 2023 | Busse Woods | Grove 27 | Elk Grove Village



Register (FREE) for the 4th Annual Hero Walk! Sign-up today and walk with the heroes of Little City on a leisurely stroll through scenic Busse Woods and help celebrate 64 years of creating hope and changing the lives of individuals with disabilities with other Little City friends and families!

Register for FREE and start fundraising today: www.LittleCity.org/herowalk2023

Walk with the Heroes of Little City!



Sept. 30, 2023 | Busse Woods | Elk Grove Village

Join us at the 4th Annual Hero Walk on September 30th!

Celebrate 64 years of creating hope and changing the lives of individuals with disabilities at the 4th Annual Hero Walk! Register (FREE) today and walk with the heroes of Little City on a leisurely stroll through scenic Busse Woods, Grove 27.

This family-friendly event for people of all ages will feature:
Lunch, refreshments, and sweet treats • Raffles • Yard games and activities
Prizes for our top teams • Photobooth • And more!

Register today at

www.LittleCity.org/HeroWalk2023

**SCAN TO
REGISTER!**

