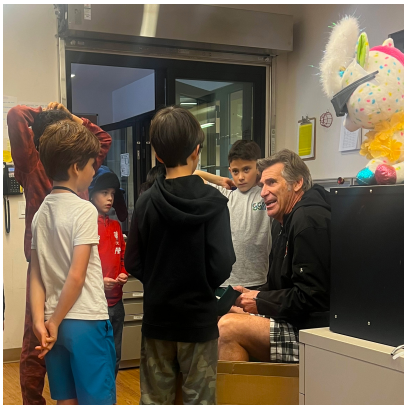


With Elvis as a mentor, Salesian Boys & Girls Club leader makes sure all the kids get a â??big hunk of loveâ??

Description

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Randal DeMartini is growing out his sideburns. Itâ??s not just a fancy for a new look. Itâ??s to raise money for the Salesian Boys and Girls Club of San Francisco.

Heâ??s the executive director but also a pretty accomplished Elvis impersonator, though he doesnâ??t call himself that.



Randal DeMartini performing as Elvis at the Silver Legacy Hotel in Reno in 2021. (Photo clipped from YouTube video)

The fundraiser will be held Aug. 26 at the Silver Legacy Hotel in Reno, where he performed with a live band and backup singers in 2021 to a crowd of 900. â??One of my bucket list items was I wanted to be Elvis for one night,â?• he explained.

Heâ??s got the looks and heâ??s not bad at the vocals.

â??It was such a big hit they wanted me to do it again, and I said Iâ??d probably never do it again.â?• He changed his mind on condition it be a fundraiser for the club. Tickets range from $50 to $100, and he hopes to raise more than $50,000.

Located next to Saints Peter and Paul Church in North Beach the club offers a variety of after-school activities, classes, and sports clubs for $10 a year for any child between 8 to 18. Currently, 200 attend.

â??Itâ??s the greatest job in the world because I can work with kids,â?• said DeMartini, 62, who started at the club 44 years ago and has been in the top job since 2016.

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DeMartini oversees bingo at the club, one of the ways it raises funds. (Photo by Mary Anne Lewis)

And besides membership fees, he also has to raise all of its $2 million annual budget. He does it through what he calls â??fun-raisers:â?• bingo, golf tournaments, crab feeds, an annual black-tie event â?? and his upcoming Elvis concert.

He has a staff of five full-time employees, 10 associates and part-timers. He also has many volunteers, including parents and retired people. All of them in various ways act as mentors. â??We are dedicated to having the kids have a great childhood. Our goal is not to put the burden on the parents and the kids.â?•

The Salesians are a Catholic order, but the club doesnâ??t promote Catholicism so much as faith. â??Everybody knows what this place is because we grew up here. Everybody who works here either came through the Boys and Girls Club or is affiliated with the Salesian order.â?•

The club slogan is â??We just share the love.â?•


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DeMartini, in back, with staff and kids at the Salesian Boys & Girls Club. (Photo courtesy of Randal DeMartini)

Whether kids have great childhoods or dysfunctional childhoods, DeMartini said he can relate.

â??It doesnâ??t matter if a child is wealthy, middle-class, underprivileged or abused. Iâ??ve seen every kid come through these doors, and honestly, if they donâ??t get addicted to drugs or alcohol, they turn

out just fine.â?•

How? â??Every kid that walks out our doors is loved,â?• he said. â??We donâ??t know whatâ??s going on in their family, but when they walk through our doors, theyâ??re part of our family.â?•

It recalls the way Elvis related to his audience and one of the reasons DeMartini considers him the greatest entertainer of all time.



As a newcomer to the rock scene in the 1950s, Elvis Presleyâ??s hip-shaking shook up the status quo. (Photo from Pixabay)

Elvis was handsome, had charisma and a great voice, he said, but â??what made him a great entertainer is that he could relate to everybody. He had no prejudice in him at all, growing up in the South.

â??What he was doing in the 1950s no one had ever seen before, singing and shaking â?? they called it the Devilâ??s music.â?•

He remembers Elvis singing â??If I Can Dreamâ?• at a 1968 concert. It was connected, he said, to the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy. â??He sang that song in hopes that we could change and make things better.â?•

It also conjures up the words of one of his mentors at the club when he was young who was encouraging him to remain. â??You wonâ??t be the wealthiest man financially, but youâ??ll be the wealthiest man in your heart because of so many kids,â?• DeMartini said. â??And he was right.â?•

The Salesians founded the Boys Club of San Francisco in 1921 to help troubled Italian youths in the neighborhood, which now encompasses North Beach, Russian Hill and Chinatown. Girls became members beginning in 1995.

The club offers athletics, theatrical education, and a multipurpose room with air hockey, a pool table and board games. A chess club was just started, and some kids are doing interviews and talking on radio station KXSF, he said.



The Salesian Boys & Girls Club offers team sports, but DeMartini encourages kids to try all sports before settling on one. (Photo courtesy of Randal DeMartini)

Thereâ??s a kitchen for cooking classes, arts and crafts, a dance studio and a tutorial classroom for kids who have homework after school. The club also offers team sports for both boys and girls through the Catholic Youth Organization.â??



Club Associate Natalia Garcia, 8th-grader Julian Stampalia and DeMartini get ready to set up a Christmas tree in December. (Photo courtesy of Randal DeMartini)

Divorced with two children, DeMartini married his wife Katrina more than 20 years ago, and they have an 18-year-old son born when DeMartini was 44. Although Nicholas just graduated high school and is headed to college, DeMartini still thinks of himself as a kid. Heâ??s a fan of the Dallas Cowboys and NASCAR. And, of course, Elvis.

â??Thatâ??s my problem,â?• he says, but itâ??s a persona that brings a number of young men and women back after graduating from high school.

â??Theyâ??re either looking for a job or a college education. I relate better to the ones who are â?? I donâ??t want to use the word â??lostâ?? â?? because who the heck knows what they want to do at 18

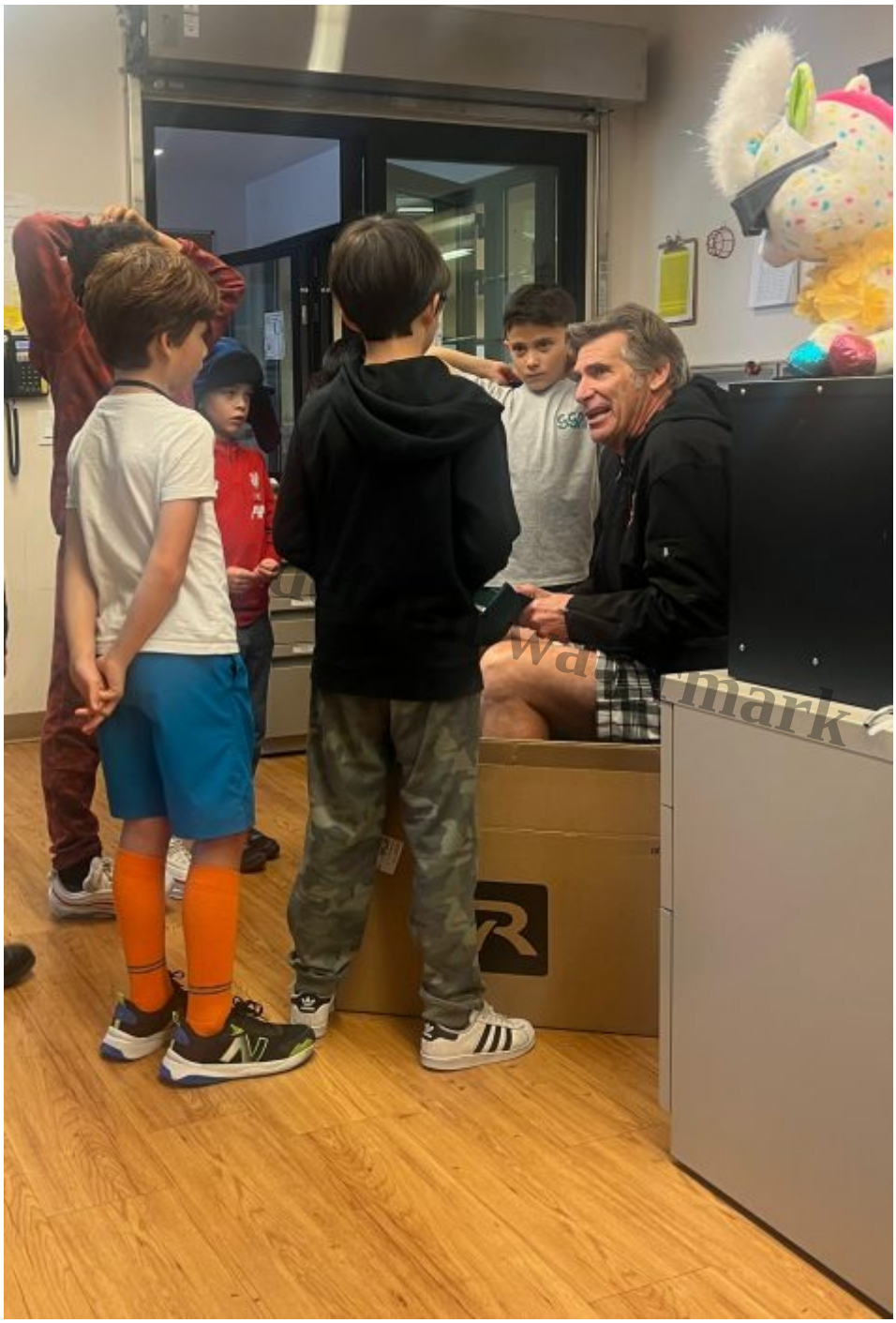
years old?â?• he said. â??Itâ??s really hard.â?•

The Marin County man, who grew up in North Beach, tries to steer them in the direction thatâ??s right for them.

â??I really try to help the kids figure out what they want to do,â?• he said. â??Iâ??m all big for education and college degrees. But donâ??t go spend all your money â?? 70 or 80 thousand dollars â??when you donâ??t know what you want to do.â?•

While thereâ??s a lot of social pressure to attend college, some kids might do better in the trades or as a fireman, electrician or police officer, he said. Many are interested in nursing and construction.

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DeMartini has added a career day for club members ready to think about such things, but most of the kids just want to have fun, he says. (Photo courtesy of Randal DeMartini)

â??I always tell these kids when they get out of high school and have a trade, by the age of 55, you can retire and be set for the rest of your life.â?•

To help them sort out the options, heâ??s started a career day. So far, heâ??s had law enforcement officers come in to talk â?? as well as experts on managing money. But he said he doesnâ??t encourage kids to get into a particular field because of money.

â??You want to get into a career that you can enjoy. A lot of people are in careers but theyâ??re not happy. Theyâ??re stressed. Theyâ??re miserable.â?•

Too often, childhood is made more difficult than it needs to be, he said, offering that it involves three stages: childhood, â??when they go to school and just want to be loved and to play;â?• adolescence, â??when they think they know everything and donâ??t have to listen to their parents,â?• and after that, adulthood. â??Thatâ??s how easy it is, but we seem to make it more complicated.â?•

With love and simple wisdom, he aims to be an example to the kids he serves.

â??I wish I could bottle the life I had, the life that I still have, because thatâ??s what I honestly think is missing: love for each other, because of money, because of hatred, because of greed.â?•

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1. All Posts

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