

Brevard Family Partnership Foundation Gala March 25, night of celebration, recognition; Sean Kostelnik of Wood River Studio is Foundation board chair

By Ken Datzman

Established in 2021, the Brevard Family Partnership Foundation has been actively engaging the community through philanthropic events.

On New Year's Eve, for example, the organization hosted "Over the Edge," an event where participants rappelled down the side of the eight-story Hilton Melbourne.

Now, the Brevard Family Partnership Foundation is gearing up for its showcase program, "A Night Among the Stars on the Space Coast," referring to the families and children that the organization serves.

"We are looking to the future with great hope and will share that message with the community at the Gala," said Philip "Phil" Scarpelli, president and chief executive officer of Brevard Family Partnership, the lead child protection agency in the county.

The black-tie event, the Brevard Family Partnership Foundation Gala, will begin at 6 p.m. on Saturday, March 25, at the Hilton Rialto. Open to the public, tickets are \$125 per individual. Sponsorships range from \$500 to \$5,000, with various amenities at each level of support. To inquire about tickets and sponsorships, contact Vanessa Skyrmes, Brevard Family Partnership's chief communications officer, at (703) 403-0863 or email Vanessa.Skyrmes@brevardfp.org.

"With our philanthropic movement — Brevard Family Partnership Foundation — we really want to paint a picture of hope, promise, and celebration," said Scarpelli. "Every day families are being reunited and children are healing. We can break the perpetual cycle of abuse if we create a community that better understands how to support healthy development in families. The collaborative effort with the community is key."

Brevard Family Partnership is contracted by the Department of Children and Families to provide foster care, adoption support, case management, and child abuse prevention services.

The board chair of Brevard Family Partnership Foundation is entrepreneur Sean Kostelnik, co-owner of Wood River Studio in Cape Canaveral.

Scarpelli first met Kostelnik at a charity golf event last year. "Sean has a genuine interest in our organization and in bettering the community. We are fortunate to have him as board chair of Brevard Family Partnership Foundation," said Scarpelli.

"I think my business plays into my involvement with Brevard Family Partnership Foundation," Kostelnik said. "I recognize that businesses and corporations have influence in society. They attract an abundance of resources and funnel a certain amount of resources philanthropically in order to support and move agendas. I challenge myself to participate in that way, to be involved in the community not only as a businessowner, but also philanthropically in support of such amazing organizations as Brevard Family Partnership."

Newly opened Wood River Studio builds handmade designer furniture and décor out of sustainably sourced exotic hardwoods. Kostelnik's company acquires building materials in various ways.

"For example, we dredge for driftwood in the Indian River. We pull up logs that were submerged underneath the intercoastal waterway for who knows how long. We have our own mill and our own kiln in Melbourne. We mill the tree and then kiln dry the wood before trans-



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

Phil Scarpelli, right, is president and CEO of Brevard Family Partnership. The Partnership provides foster care, adoption support, case management, and child abuse prevention services and is contracted by the Department of Children and Families. Businessman Sean Kostelnik is board chair of Brevard Family Partnership Foundation. Kostelnik is co-founder and co-owner of Wood River Studio in Cape Canaveral. His company builds handmade designer furniture. The Foundation will host 'A Night Among the Stars on the Space Coast' March 25 at the Hilton Melbourne. They are at Brevard Family Partnership in Rockledge.

forming it into furniture," said Kostelnik, who grew up in Ohio and earned his bachelor's degree in business administration and management from Baldwin Wallace University in Berea.

Wood River Studio (woodriverstudio.com) also has partnerships with local tree-removal companies.

"When a hurricane comes through the area or if somebody needs to remove a tree from their property, that tree usually ends up in a landfill. So, we are rescuing trees from the landfill. Again, we mill them, dry them, and build furniture out of them."

And Wood River Studio's third source for acquiring wood is through its partnerships in Costa Rica, one of

the most ecologically friendly countries in the world.

"They set the gold standard for reforestation," said Kostelnik. "We have partnerships with tree-extraction companies, mills, and processing facilities. We are not impacting any forests. We only harvest trees that are dead, dying or down. These partnerships are with fourth- and fifth-generation family-owned businesses in Costa Rica."

Kostelnik says he flies to Costa Rica and "hand selects every piece of wood that comes through Wood River Studio."

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His business partner is Lenard Kensey. They met in early 2022 at Melbourne Makerspace, where people can create their own projects using their own materials and knowledge.

Wood River Studio has a showroom and a wood and metal shop in Cape Canaveral.

“With the launch of this business, our interest is to bring back artisanship to furniture-making in America. Our focus is on delivering a superior product and superior service, but, ultimately, it’s about the culture and the ecosystem we are creating — the level of impact we have with our employees and the involvement we have with the community,” he said.

Wood River Studio has been open only a short time, but “business has been incredible. We are being embraced by people throughout Brevard County.”

Before becoming an entrepreneur, Kostelnik worked for Motorola Solutions for 11 years.

“I started with them designing mission-critical communications equipment for first responders before going into sales with the company,” he said. “I lived in five states in 11 years. I did a lot of traveling. It was an incredible experience.”

His parents have a condominium in Brevard County and are winter residents.

“I couldn’t feel more grateful and more blessed to be in Brevard County,” said Kostelnik, whose education also includes a year of law school.

“It’s been a surreal experience ever since I decided this is where I am going to root-down and create a business. And being involved in the community as a volunteer with organizations is one of my passions.”

Brevard Family Partnership is marking its 20th year in 2023. The nonprofit entity was established in 2003 in response to the Florida Legislative mandate to privatize foster care and related services.

“We are concluding our second decade of privatization,” said Scarpelli. “We are a leader in this field, not only in Brevard but also across the state. We are a leader in so many ways, such as engaging the community and letting people know there is probably nothing more important than protecting a child, giving them hope for tomorrow, and being part of a loving family.”

In fiscal year 2021–22, his organization served 2,000 children in the county. Brevard Family Partnership, which manages a network of foster homes, completed more than 150 adoptions during that fiscal year.

Scarpelli was one of the speakers for the Lutheran Services in America CEO Summit, which brings together experts from around the nation in a range of areas, including health care, philanthropy, academia, and business. The CEO Summit was Jan. 22–25 near Phoenix, Arizona.

Scarpelli talked about how his organization serves families, and some of the best practices it provides not only locally but also outside the state.

“We are doing training in three different states on how to engage families toward resolving and owning the destiny of their situations. We share Brevard C.A.R.E.S.’ wraparound approach. Good researchers will take something they can put their arms around and spend a lot of painstaking years developing it. We see where else it might work and who it might help. And in return we receive feedback. It helps us strengthen who we are, what we do, and how we do it.”

The acronym C.A.R.E.S. stands for Coordination, Advocacy, Resources, Education and Support.

Brevard C.A.R.E.S.’ “wraparound” approach and Family Team Conferencing offer services and support to

families experiencing stressors that could lead to child abuse, neglect, or abandonment.

A Night Among the Stars on the Space Coast will include guest speakers, a silent auction, foster parent and partner recognition, plus dinner and dancing.

The program will feature children from The Viera Studio for the Performing Arts, whose owner and director is Monica Toro Lisciandro.

“We will have a group of children who will be performing that evening,” she said. “They will be doing a Broadway review. Some of the children who will be performing have been in foster care. They have been adopted and have found their permanent homes. So that is going to be beautiful, exciting to see.”

Lisciandro earned her bachelor’s degree in theater arts from Marymount Manhattan College, an institution well known nationally for its theater program.

While in college, she taught at the Professional Performing Arts School in Manhattan, and discovered her passion for theater education.

Lisciandro is a foster parent. “It was a calling to be a foster parent. I do have three biological children. We are

happy to be fostering and helping children and be a support system for them. It creates a great sense of pride to see these children flourish in life. I highly recommend fostering to others in the community who are thinking about it. It’s a rewarding experience.”

In 2022 statewide, 5,121 children were reunified with their families, and nearly 3,900 children were adopted, according to the Florida Department of Children and Families.

Prospective foster parents in the area work with community organizations such as Brevard Family Partnership to complete the licensing process.

“At the Brevard Family Partnership Foundation Gala, we will recognize people in the community who are treasured as valued partners helping us help families,” said Scarpelli.

“We will be recognizing everybody from law enforcement to providers to group home and foster families — the everyday heroes that are changing lives. When you impact the life of a child in foster care, you are impacting a generation. That child grows up with a sense of value and sense of guidance, direction, and support.”

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