

Minnesota Assoc. Gives Generously to Troubled Teens

OLYMPIC MEDALIST DIRECTS FUNDS TO HOMELESS YOUTH CENTER

Steve Kelly, managing editor

At an inch shy of six feet, and 230 pounds, Dennis Koslowski, D.C., is an imposing figure, especially if your eyeballing him at arms-length across a wrestling mat: big-boned, bull-necked, the stocky musculature of a heavyweight champ coming at you with the deftness and quickness of a big cat.

As a competitor in the ancient Greco-Roman style of wrestling, where no holds are allowed below the waist, Dennis Koslowski has excelled: NCAA Division III Champion 1979, 1981; U.S. National Greco-Roman Wrestling Champion seven times; four-time World Cup silver medalist (1985-87, 1991); silver medalist in the 1983 and 1987 Pan-American Games; the 1988 Olympic bronze medal in Seoul; silver medalist, 1992 Olympics, Barcelona.

Dennis explains that this level of competition "... really forces you to take a trip into your soul and see what your about."

After the Seoul Olympics, Dr. Koslowski coached the U.S. National Greco-Roman team (89-90), but found he wanted to spend more time at his chiropractic practice in Minneapolis; he also knew the competitive fire still burned within him, that he could still compete as a world-class athlete -- Barcelona beckoned. Giving up the coaching job, he won a second consecutive spot on the U.S. Olympic team and went on to win the silver medal, the only Minnesotan to win a medal in Barcelona, and the only chiropractor in the '92 Olympics to win a medal.

Returning from Spain, Dennis settled back into his practice, and his family life in St. Louis Park with Parisian born wife Sylvie, and daughters Angela, age 6, and Natalie 17 months.

Dennis' interest in chiropractic began while an undergraduate student at the University of Minnesota, Morris. During the wrestling season he injured his ankle. The injury became acute. As a member of the university's football team, the injured continued to plague him until he went to a chiropractor for treatment. Dennis was so impressed with the speedy recovery from the ankle injury under chiropractic care, that he matriculated at Northwestern College of Chiropractic after obtaining his B.S. in biology at Morris. He graduated from NWCC in 1986.

Project OffStreets

While we're all confronted by the bleak reality of ever increasing number of homeless people, the disquieting fact is that many of the nouveau homeless are teenagers, a tragedy of astonishing proportions. In Minnesota, a state with only four and three-quarters of a million people, the Minnesota Chiropractic Association (MCA) learned that an estimated 8,000 teenagers are reported missing each year in that state, with another 2,000 cases never reported. These "missing" kids are runaways who often end up in the metropolitan area of Minneapolis, homeless and jobless.

When the MCA sought to honor Dr. Koslowski for his Olympic accomplishments, they wanted to start a donation drive for a worthwhile project that would benefit their community. They asked

Dennis what charities interested him.

Dr. Koslowski's choice came from the heart: Project OffStreets, an emergency shelter and center for homeless teenagers in downtown Minneapolis.

When Dennis was a child, his mother died. His father was unable to care for him and brother Duane. Although they were taken in by his aunt and uncle, the feelings of being rejected by his father were very strong.

"It was a very tough time for me," Dennis admitted. "We were kind of thrust into their hands. There were times I felt like running away. I never did, but I felt very trapped and not real loved. So I relate with these children."

"It's surprising, it's not just poor children, but all social strata. These kids aren't what some people would think: bad kids, or problem children. A lot of the fault lies with the parents not being able to deal with their own lives."

The Minnesota Chiropractic Association (MCA) received \$9,960 in donation from 250 DCs across the state to aid Project OffStreets.

"We couldn't think of a better way to honor the achievements of Dr. Koslowski at the 1992 Olympics than to raise awareness of the needs of homeless teens and help improve health services for them," said Scott Mayer executive director of the MCA. "Project OffStreets provides excellent education and outreach services to homeless youth who come to Minneapolis from all over Minnesota."

The generosity of Minnesota chiropractors will allow Project OffStreets to purchase equipment for health screenings (variety of health conditions, including respiratory infections and sexually transmitted diseases), and create a private clinic room.

"The clinic room will allow us to expand our health services and also give the youth the privacy and confidentiality they deserve when getting screened for what are often sensitive, but real health concerns for homeless youth," said Project OffStreets Director Edward McBrayer.

In 1991, Project Offstreets worked with 1,100 teenagers providing emergency shelter, referral to health services, counseling, job assistance and daily evening meals at the "drop-in" center.

Dennis Koslowski, D.C. said it best: "There has to be something out there for them (the teenage homeless), to give them direction and get them through those rough times and give them a future."

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