

Meet the Mentor (and Mentee): Charles Havrda & Jake Cheesman

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Photo courtesy of Guilford Youth Mentoring Mentor Charles Havrda and mentee Jake Cheesman, now a senior at Guilford High School, have built a bond over a decade of meeting for an hour once a week.



Meet the Mentoring Pair

Over the last 10 years, Charles Havrda and Jake Cheesman have met for an hour each week during the school year talking and exploring a little bit about an older man's experiences and ideas and a younger man's life possibilities, problems, and the future.

Cheesman, now a senior at Guilford High School, says of mentoring, "It's friendship, all that kind of thing."

He has been enjoying that friendship since the 2nd grade and he is now on his way to college.

Havrda says, "For me, it's been another sort of experience, a new life experience to share"- he smiles-"and I get to hear what is going on in the schools."

The pair has been together throughout most of the existence of the Guilford Mentoring Program, now more than 10 years old. It started with 12 mentors serving 12 Guilford High School freshmen. Now the program has more than 150 mentors meeting with mentees of every age at all Guilford Public Schools.

Any way you look at it, Havrda and Cheesman are a pretty good example of the success and significance of the mentoring program-talking, working out the future, and getting things done, all based on friendship and meeting once a week.

Havrda has two sons, two young granddaughters, and recently merged his longtime printing business with Royal Printing. He is a member of the Board of Selectmen and serves on the boards of the Guilford Savings Bank and the recently opened Soundview YMCA.

Cheesman has three brothers and he has been meeting Havrda since he was eight years old. Cheesman has become an accomplished young man. In addition to school and working regularly, he enjoys jet skiing and competing in motocross. Now he works all summer full-time at the Guilford Yacht Club and, during the school year, four times a week at Palumbo's Automotive Unlimited.

Cheesman says, with a big smile and obvious pride, "I pay all my own bills, for all my insurance, my telephone bills, my gasoline, and savings for college."

He has also taken part in the Guilford Police Explorers program "riding along with a cop" and "learning how to become a police officer." And right now, he says, "I want to be a cop."

He made an early application to the University of New Haven, with "pretty good scores," met with admissions people, and was accepted with a scholarship.

He says, "I'm going to major in criminal justice. They guide you to a point where you can apply to police departments and you have enough background knowledge."

Mentoring started when Cheesman was at Calvin Leete Elementary School.

Havrda says, "We talked about everything, walked down the halls, and he showed me the school, his classroom, his pictures and work on the wall. I've never forgotten it."

Over the years, they have shot basketball outside Adams, walked, searched for empty classrooms for meetings, talked, and sometimes worked on homework.

Havrda says, "It's always more getting the homework done than helping with it."

And they have played chess.

Havrda says, "I'm pretty lousy. I get beaten, but I've won once or twice."

Cheesman says, "I'm not that good."

Are Cheesman and Havrda going to keep up their relationship?

Havrda says, "We're going to keep it up, yes."

Cheesman nods with a big grin.

To find out how to become a part of Guilford Youth Mentoring, call 203-453-2741 ext. 269 or visit www.guilford.k12.ct.us/~mentoring.