FROM THE HEART

Silicon Valley-based nonprofit Fit Kids will host a star-powered event this month to raise funds for fitness programs for underserved Bay Area youth.

Here at Gentry we’ve always had a special place in our heart for Fit Kids—the local nonprofit founded by Ashley Hunter. Hunter credits an article in Gentry about the Bay Area Youth Sports Foundation for providing the “aha” moment that would not only change the course of her life, but also the lives of thousands of low-income elementary school students. Hunter relates, “I thought to myself, ‘All these kids can’t afford to play sports and that’s not okay. I knew I could do something to help.’

In 2011, Hunter launched Fit Kids and to this day serves as its dynamic executive director. Over the years, Fit Kids has helped thousands of children in grades Kindergarten through 8th fall in love with fitness. Fit Kids’ goal is to increase kids’ physical activity levels to develop physically fit, healthy children. Physical activity is essential to a healthy childhood, but far too many young children, especially in underserved communities, lack the opportunity to engage in structured physical activity.

The Fit Kids program helps prepare children for a healthy, active life. Whether delivered by trained, professional coaches at the nonprofit’s Innovation Sites, or coaches employed by its partner sites, Fit Kids helps children improve their strength, power, coordination, balance, aerobic capacity, body awareness, and agility. The program also develops basic movement and motor skills, such as hand-eye coordination, running, and throwing. The curriculum includes dozens of different exercises, fitness games, and fun activities that get kids moving.

On April 30, Fit Kids will launch a fundraiser — lunch with Hollywood power couple Chyena Phillips (Grammy-nominated artist and co-founder of Wilson Phillips) and Billy Baldwin (film/television actor and star of Netflix series Northern Rescue) as keynote speakers. Gentry caught up with Phillips and Baldwin to discover their passion for causes that improve children’s lives.

G: How did you get involved with the Fit Kids Fundraiser?

CHYENA PHILLIPS: Our friend Dr. Lawrence Piro (who is also emceeing the event) connected us to Fit Kids. His daughter, Whitney, works with Fit Kids and is helping to put on the event.

BILLY BALDWIN: There is a lot of overlap between other nonprofits we work with and what Fit Kids represents. Helping underprivileged youth is something that we both feel strongly about.

G: You are both in terrific shape. How do you work fitness into your lives?

BB: My exercise is about maintaining my body and preventing injury. I was a high school and college wrestler. A little cardio, a little weight training, and keeping my body loose through yoga is key now. Exercise, diet, sleep, and stress management are essential.

CP: The older you get, you have to work twice as hard for the same results. My diet and healthy eating are very important. It is all about what you put in your body. The better you take care of yourself, the more you are dependent on taking care of yourself. We both do yoga.

G: What motivates your giving?

BB: It is just in my DNA. I was raised by parents who were always advocating “the four A’s” (academics, athletics, arts, and activism). My father, in particular, was our role model. He was a high school teacher, coached football, ran the summer recreation programs, and was our Cub Scout master.

CP: I had a very chaotic upbringing and when I heard Billy’s father was his Cub Scout master—they lived in the same town his whole life and his parents were still together—I literally proposed to Billy.

G: You’re both strong advocates for mental health. Please tell us about that.

BB: Chyena had a family member that became ill and they had to do a conservation over him. It was complicated and hard for us all, especially because at the time he didn’t see himself as having a problem, but it was the right decision. He now lives and works and doesn’t need help. He isn’t dependent on anyone now and can live his own life.

CP: In the ‘80s, the government stripped away a lot of regulations and programs in mental health. Those cutbacks need to be revised and addressed because it has a huge affect on our nation. We could be helping so many of the homeless if they simply had access to the proper care.

G: What causes are you supporting now?

BB: Chyena is very passionate about building an orphanage down in Tijuana. She is a devout Christian. The orphanage helps about 50 young Mexican girls. We ensure that the older girls go to college and pay for it. Some of them have even come back to help with the young girls now.

CP: Billy does a lot of work in the area of breast cancer. He has also helped raise $20 million for the nonprofit SickKids.

G: What are you working on professionally?

CP: Billy is working on the Netflix show Northern Rescue and a show for Amazon titled Too Old to Die Young with Miles Teller. He is also working on the first season of the TV version of The Purge for USA Network and a sequel to Backdraft. Chyena balances performing with Wilson Phillips and family life.

For tickets and more information regarding the Fit Kids Luncheon on April 30, please visit fitkids.org.