

**Community Celebration Speech
Tori Belkin
November 3, 2023**

Good evening everyone,

It's a privilege to stand here today as we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the North Conway Community Center, a cornerstone of our community that has certainly grown and evolved over the past 75 years while staying true to its mission of fostering a sense of community in our small town.

If my mom hasn't already told every single one of you who I am - my name is Tori and I have the privilege of being one of Monica Belkin's daughters. In case there's any doubt how much the Community Center means to my mom - I want you all to know she picked me coming home for this celebration instead of me making the journey from my home in Washington, DC to North Conway in a few weeks for Thanksgiving.

The legacy of involvement my family shares with this center traverses four generations. It started with my great-grandmother, Ada Jones, whose culinary skills graced the PTA suppers here. Ada's daughter, my Nana, grew up coming to the center - most notably taking dance classes throughout her childhood. My mom then carried the torch forward, engaging in a myriad of activities in her childhood from Girl Scouts to cheerleading and she has continued to be involved in the community center ever since.

For me - my love for the community center started with sports. First T-ball which are some of my fondest early memories from kindergarten and then to field hockey which I played from early elementary all through high school. It is not the fact the community center offered sports that sticks with me - but the role models that were given to me through these sports.

Deryl Fleming, a dedicated member and later the president of the board at the North Conway Community Center, was the cornerstone of my field hockey journey. Under her guidance, I picked up my first hockey stick at the center, a place she tirelessly advocated for. Deryl was more than just a coach; she was a pivotal figure in my growth, instilling values of sportsmanship, perseverance, and community that I carry with me today. Through her eyes, field hockey was more than a game, it was a medium to nurture young minds to become better individuals on and off the field. Her mantra still sticks with me daily "believe in the dream, achieve the goal."

It's not just North Conway Community Center Sports Programs that helped shape me into who I am today... My first paycheck bore the emblem of the snack shack on the playground here, a humble yet sweet beginning to my working life. Fast forwarding to college, an internship opportunity here presented itself, allowing me to contribute to ideas for future youth programming. It was a full circle moment - from being someone who benefited from these programs, to being able to help shape the future of them.

As an adult - I am still called back to this community at least once a year for Mud Bowl. For people in my life who are unfamiliar with the event, I understand it can be an odd thing to prioritize coming home for. But to me, it's an event that underscores the fun nature of the North Conway Community as a whole and I feel lucky to be a participant in the fan fare every year following in my Mom's footsteps.

Over 75 years, the North Conway Community Center has come a long way. The unveiling of the new building wasn't just a physical expansion; it symbolized the growing aspirations and capabilities of our community. Now we are able to welcome even more groups of all ages to gather, interact, and create lasting memories.

The essence of a community center stretches beyond its physical structure; it's a hub of collective experiences, a cradle for nurturing talents, fostering friendships, and creating a sense of belonging. It's a

realm where every individual, regardless of age or background, finds a thread of connection.

As we reminisce and celebrate this milestone, take time to consider the memories, the laughter, learnings, and camaraderie shared over the decades here. Let those memories be a reminder of the invaluable role a community center plays in shaping our lives and the generations to come.

Thank you, and here's to many more years of community, connection, and celebration at the North Conway Community Center!