

# The Lion & The Legend

Dear All!

I have long waited for this moment. I am pleased to announce a significant milestone toward advancing Every Kid Counts mission. We have recently consummated a collaborative relationship with the newly formed expansion of our charity, now based in California – Every Kid Counts - The Lion and the Legend. This initiative has a special, sentimental meaning to me; and at the end of this letter it will reinvigorate your inspiration for our cause.

On the Grid Iron, nearly 20 years ago in College, I met an intensely energetic individual who became a fast friend. Larry Gerrans was our starting Inside Linebacker and Team captain. He was our leader and a friend to all. He set an example on the Football Field, in the Class Room and among friends and strangers alike. Larry assisted myself and several other fellow athletes in the founding of the NAU Student Athlete Council and was its first Vice President then superseded me as President, a legacy that still endures. After Larry returned from a brief stint playing Football overseas he invited his best friend Leo to come enjoy college life in Arizona.

Leo Hartford was an instantaneous hit among friends. Larry and Leo together were a dynamite combination. These life-long friends were an amazing duo. Both had remarkable good looks, a gentlemanly charm and a refreshing energy! They were passionate and intense. These were two guys you liked instantaneously and knew you wanted on your team! Having worked with Larry on community outreach programs and youth activities, as members of both the Football team and the Student Athlete Council, I became inspired to lend my life toward service. As such, I formed EKC; and here we are today! I worked with Larry at the inception of EKC. In fact, he lent me assistance in crafting our ByLaws – our Charter! Larry has always remained supportive and in touch with EKC. More importantly, he has always aspired to play a larger role in our cause – the Kids!

However, he and Leo made no delays right out of College. They both collaborated to get into the world of Orthopedic Implants and Sports Medicine and within two months of graduating college the both of them landed high paying jobs selling Hip & Knee Replacements for Depuy Orthopedics – a Johnson & Johnson Company. Within 4 years the two of them became the Top Salesmen for Zimmer Orthopedics and Stryker – the two largest orthopedic companies in the world! Over the years I have had the pleasure to watch their meteoric rise.

The last I met with Leo and Larry, I took inventory of the two. They were prideful of their journey from boyhood to manhood to fatherhood. I asked them where they aspired to go from here. Without delay and almost in synchrony they both said in concert ‘Empire Building’! The two of them together were so intense! They just fed off one another and it was a bit overwhelming to be in their presence. Leo asserted “it’s time to build the empire, big Rob”!

I mistook their intensity for blind ambition. So, I said “what about giving back?” “Everyday!” Leo shot back! “That’s why we’re going after the Empire Perelka!” Chimed Larry “Just can’t do enough in a day, Brother Rob! We gotta get to the next level so we can lead the charge in a

meaningful way". So I said "what are you guys doing every day to at least contribute to a cause?"

"More than most!" Larry said with conviction. "Every day is a good deed for us, Brother Rob! You see people do not know guys like Leo & I exist! But if it wasn't for our thankless jobs the hundreds of people who have our implants put in them every week may not have as good an outcome as they otherwise do!" "We are modern day Guardian Angels!!" Leo exclaimed! "Our Surgeons are the best at what they do! Because we are the best at what we do!" ...and with that Leo & Larry High Fived! They then dipped their bread into their wine glasses .... took the sacrament .... Chugged the remaining wine in their glasses .... Looked at one another knowingly and without a word sent their wine glasses smashing into the fire place .... and laughed!

As the bravado settled, Leo draped his big arm around my shoulder and while filling my glass he said "I feel you, Big Rob! We are not doing enough for the kids. You know if it wasn't for all the people who took an interest in the Big G-man and I, it could be a different world for us! There are some kids out there that need me! I get that! We need to find them! We need to do more for the kids, Legend!"

Larry raised his glass "Let us commit! To the kids!" and together they started chanting "EKC...EKC...EKC!!!"

On July 28, 2009, Leo Hartford passed away at the youthful age of 41. He died from complications related to cardio megalay – an enlarged heart. He left behind two young daughters and a newborn son, along with a wonderful and adoring family and thousands, literally thousands, of friends!

Leo was a unique individual. As a child, his family and friends nicknamed him the Lion, for his aggressive and powerful nature. Larry relates a story where he and Leo would go from house to house earning money mowing lawns. If a neighbor refused their service, they would mow the lawn anyway in an effort to show the neighbor how good a job they did. Leo was simply an individual who refused to be denied. His entrepreneurialism expanded throughout his youth. He created and sold T-shirts to pay for his athletic equipment. He would walk onto construction sites and convince the contractor to hire him for odd jobs.

Leo's tenacity served him well as a competitor. He was an All League Football Player and an All American Lacrosse Player. He was the highest achieving Orthopedic Implant Salesman for the largest Orthopedic Manufacturer in the world – Zimmer Orthopedics for 10 straight years. A remarkable accomplishment! Leo set every record in his company and created many firsts.

Soon after my conversation with Leo, he took action on his promise. He joined the Northern California Chapter of Special Olympics, serving as a Board Member. He coached youth Football and youth Lacrosse. He donated to charities such as Books for Barrio's. He wasted no time in taking action and his actions impacted the lives of a couple hundred children.

Leo possessed unique, god given talents. However, his talents and skill sets were forged during his formative years by loving and attentive mentors who took the time to recognize him and his

potential. Leo was grateful to his mentors and humbled by their contribution. He recognized the need to give back and acted generously in doing so. Leo's story embodies the spirit of EKC's purpose and reflects the cycle of reciprocity inherent in EKC's mission – **Today's Youth...Tomorrow's Leader's!**

We are sorry for Leo's passing! We are thankful for the inspiration of his Life! Welcome to the All New Every Kid Counts California – Lion and the Legend Chapter. May we keep the inspiration of Leo alive in memory and our action in supporting the kids. As our new leaders so eloquently stated "Let us Commit! To the Kids! EKC!....EKC!....EKC!!!"

Yours for the Kids,

Rob Perelka  
EKC President – Co-founder