

# News From Catholic Big Brothers Big Sisters

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## Olegario “Ollie” Cantos Honored as California’s 2004 Big Brother of the Year

Big Brother Volunteer Olegario “Ollie” Cantos has been chosen 2004 Big Brother of the Year by 27 member agencies of the California Collaborative of Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Ollie’s motivation for becoming a Big Brother stems from the experiences he encountered growing up blind and realizing, first hand, the value in mentoring. “As a blind child, life was difficult at times, not because of any barriers posed by my disability itself but more accurately because of attitudes by some kids and adults about my blindness, which limited my opportunity for well-rounded growth.” Ollie has overcome the physical and emotional obstacles endured by the blind, in part, because of his parents’ unconditional support. From an early age, he was encouraged to pursue his goals, and he did. Ollie received a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Loyola Marymount University and then earned a Juris Doctorate.

Ollie has been Big Brother to two boys – Seth, now 12 and Vicente, who suffers a disability from a traumatic brain injury caused by a car accident when he was very young and is now 18 years old. Over the years they have done just about every activity imaginable to a “match”, from playing catch to going to the movies, from community service to just hanging out together. As Ollie says: “more than ever, kids these days need positive role models to go to for advice, help guide them on a path to a solid future, and be a buddy to them in good times and in bad. I truly believe that, with the right level of commitment firmly in place, disability becomes immaterial. Indeed, that is exactly what has happened. It’s the ‘quality time’ that’s most important.” “As far as I am concerned, these awesome buddies of mine ARE my Little Brothers, not just as part of the program in name only, but as brothers in every sense of the word. In a very real way, I have adopted them, and these adoptions are for life!” adds Ollie. While he now resides in the Washington, D.C. area, Ollie continues to maintain communication with both his Little Brothers, often talking to them for hours at a time.

Currently, Ollie serves as the General Counsel and Director of Programs to the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) where he provides advocacy and legal counsel to people with disabilities at a national level. He works extensively to promote awareness about the rights of the disability community, and is the national coordinator for Disability Mentoring Day. Ollie has been recognized for his work by President George W. Bush and Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao.

Affiliated with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, Catholic Big Brothers Big Sisters is an independent, non-sectarian non-profit organization that serves volunteers and children of all faiths and backgrounds throughout Los Angeles County. It is a United Way agency. For information about becoming a Big Brother or Big Sister or to enroll your daughter or son, call (800)463-4066 or (213)251-9800 or TTY (213)251-9571 or visit our web site [www.catholicbigbrothers.org](http://www.catholicbigbrothers.org).