

# Investing in Great Futures

Anthony Anderson Headlines the 25th Annual Comics for Kids

BY BRETT WILBUR



**Boys and Girls Clubs of Monterey County President and CEO Michael L. Jackson says, “We are trying to replicate as much as possible what smaller schools provide to children. We have to help.”**

**F**or the past 50 years, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Monterey County has been providing a safe place for thousands of children, ages 6-18. With locations in Seaside and Salinas, the Clubs provide hot meals, homework assistance, college counseling, after-school activities, sports and much more for an average of 600 youth per day.

According to President and CEO Michael L. Jackson, “We invest in kids now, set high expectations, incentivize them, pay

attention to them...teach them the value of earning [success], and we have positive outcomes.”

The Clubs are cheerful, modern and most importantly, filled with passionate staff who encourage children of all ages to dream big. “We serve any child who walks in the door,” Jackson says. The Clubs’ Great Futures campaign, launched in coordination with the 50th anniversary, has a goal of raising \$6 million in the next two to three years in order to expand the facilities and add more services for 6,000 youth.

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Award-winning actor, comedian, writer and producer Anthony Anderson of ABC's "Black-ish" grew up using the Boys and Girls Clubs of Watts/Willowbrook in Los Angeles.



The 25th annual Comics for Kids fundraiser at The Inn at Spanish Bay in Pebble Beach, which takes place on March 17, is hosted this year by award-winning actor, writer, producer and comedian Anthony Anderson of the ABC hit show "Black-ish."

"Anthony Anderson is a Club kid and a National Hall of Fame member," Jackson says. "We are so excited to have him representing our audiences."

*Carmel Magazine* spoke with Anderson a few months before the event, which organizers hope will raise \$1 million for youth services.

**Carmel Magazine:** You're headlining the 2018 Comics for Kids Event in Pebble Beach to benefit the Boys & Girls Clubs of Monterey County. What is your personal connection with the organization? How important do you feel it is for after-school and summer programs to fill in the gaps between school and home? What are the specific needs you feel we, as a culture, need to be aware of to support our children? How are we doing? What needs to improve?

**Anthony Anderson:** My personal connection to the Boys and Girls Clubs is that I was Club kid at the Watts/Willowbrook Boys and Girls Club. I was also inducted into the Boys and Girls Clubs of America Hall of Fame this past year. Their after-school and summer programs are very important for numerous reasons, including a lot of children are latchkey

kids, myself included when I was a child. That being said, the program not only serves as a safe haven from predators, gang violence and drugs but most of all is a place where kids can feel safe. They feel protected in a place where they are cared for. It also is a place that Club kids can express themselves and are free to dream. A place where education is paramount and their well-being always come first.

We need to listen to our children. If we only took the time to listen to them and not be so fast to tell them what we need or want them to do, we as adults could learn a few things. There is no truer saying than "out of the mouths of babes..." Truth, honesty, hope, despair are things that we would hear. Things that we would be compelled to do something about if only we took the time to LISTEN! I think we're doing ok, but things can always get better. The improvement comes from us taking the time to stop and be present in the conversations that we are having with these children.

**CM:** You walk a very successful line between drama and comedy on your hit ABC show "Black-ish." What has surprised you most about reactions from viewers to subjects that are typically not discussed on television? Are there any topics that you feel are too "hot" to touch on prime-time, or are we ready as a culture to be pushed? Are there any limits?

**AA:** Nothing has really surprised me about the success of our show.



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**Yara Shahidi plays Zoey Johnson, the oldest child of Andre and Dr. Rainbow Johnson on ABC's "Black-ish." Anthony Anderson stars as Dre, an advertising executive struggling to keep his children's values intact in a privileged world.**

Many of the story lines on “Black-ish” come from Anderson and creator Kenya Barris. Here, Dre worries that his son Junior will outstrip him in basketball.



Kenya Barris, creator of "Black-ish," and I sat down five years ago to tell our family stories. We understood that if we told these stories from a specific point of view truthfully and honestly from an authentic place we could be successful and reach a worldwide audience. There's nothing "too hot" for us to discuss on our show. If it fits our family organically, the sky is the limit. We hold up a mirror for us all to face the reality in which we live and to decide how we are going to deal with the reflection we see. We will push the envelope on sexism, racism, ageism, homophobia, classism and whatever other "ism" you can think of.

**CM:** "Black-ish" is made up of a very cohesive and talented ensemble cast. Can you share

how collaborating with your fellow cast members has influenced the direction of the show? What is the process with creator Kenya Barris? Also, how much fun is it to work with this group?

**AA:** The direction of our show starts with Kenya and our staff of excellent writers. We all have shared stories with Kenya and our writing team and they have turned those ideas into great episodes. Fun doesn't even begin to scratch the surface. I get to work with the best cast in television. We love, trust and respect one another. There's nothing that we wouldn't do for one another.

**CM:** Who have been some of your favorite guest stars on the show? Is there anyone you are hoping to get on "Black-ish" in the future?

**AA:** I don't want to single out any one guest star, but I will tell you that I'm looking forward to having Oprah Winfrey, Halle Berry, Barack and Michelle Obama on our show, just to name a few.

**CM:** How do you spend your downtime? What is your favorite thing



**Anderson at the 2016 Emmy Awards. Anderson recently hosted the NAACP Image Awards, where he and "Black-ish" won big.**

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to do when you visit the Carmel area?

**AA:** I spend my downtime playing golf, gardening in a 1,000-square-foot garden and cooking.

My favorite thing to do when I visit the Carmel area is to slow down, relax and play tons of golf. Oh, and eat some great food.

**CM:** What accomplishments are you most proud of?

**AA:** I'm most proud of being an inspiration to people by working on our show "Black-ish" and sharing our personal stories that's having such a profound impact around the world.

**CM:** Can you let us know what to expect from the spin-off "Grown-ish?" What other projects are in the works for you?

**AA:** What can you expect from "Grown-ish" is everything that young teenage boys and

girls go through as college freshmen living on their own without their parent's supervision. My other projects include my ABC game show with my mother called, "To Tell the Truth."

**CM:** Do you have any personal goals you hope to achieve in the new year?

**AA:** My personal goals are to keep growing as a person and artist.

**CM:** If you had the power to change one thing about our society, what would it be?

**AA:** If I had the power to change anything in our society, it would be tolerance and acceptance.

*The 25th annual Comics for Kids Auction, featuring Anthony Anderson, takes place on March 17 from 5:30-10:30pm at The Inn at Spanish Bay in Pebble Beach. For more information, go to [bgcmc.org/special-events/comics-for-kids-18/](http://bgcmc.org/special-events/comics-for-kids-18/). To learn more about the Boys & Girls Clubs of Monterey County, call 831/394-5171.*