

YOUNG LEADERS

BUSINESS COURIER

OCTOBER 7, 2005 | 39

cincinnati.bizjournals.com

JOSEPH BERNINGER

Age: 38

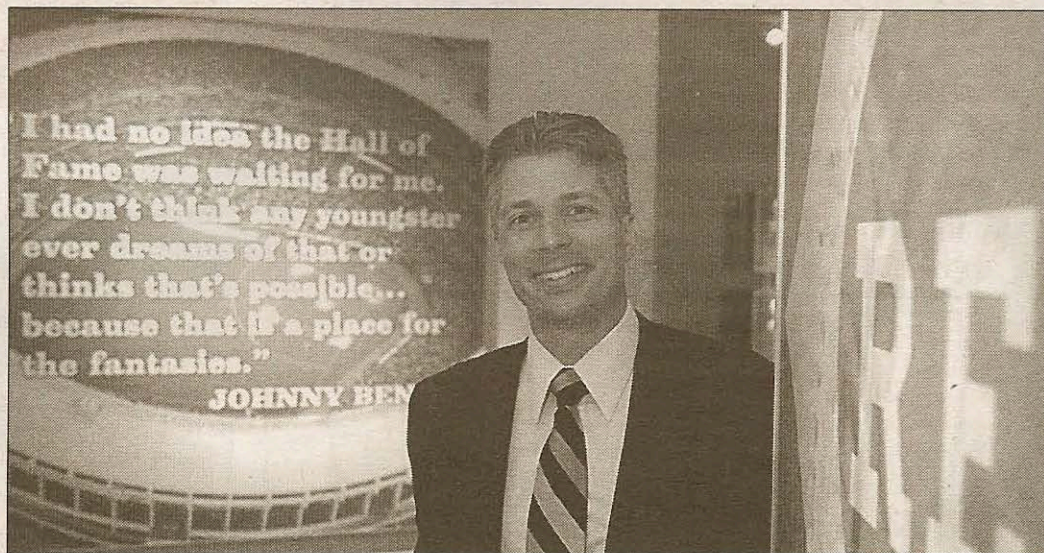
Joseph Berninger learned early in life about giving back.

The 38-year-old executive director and co-founder of Cooperative for Education grew up in southern Indiana, where his parents owned a cut-your-own Christmas tree farm. In just a few weeks, they would earn a big chunk of the year's profits.

"I just remember this pile of cash on the kitchen table, and my parents would take some and divide it up into plain, unmarked envelopes. Then we'd drive around and drop them into the mailboxes of needy families in our area," he said.

Berninger said the example his parents taught him is the inspiration for the work he does today. That work has been successful in changing the lives of thousands of children in Guatemala. Since co-founding Cooperative for Education in 1996, Berninger has provided textbooks, scholarships, libraries and computer training to 134 schools in Guatemala. He runs the organization's U.S. office from its headquarters in Oakley and also does fund raising for it.

Berninger first went to Guatemala with his brother Jeff in 1991 in hopes of finding a new place to escape the cold winters of Cincinnati. The trip led to life changes for both



MARK BOWEN | COURIER

brothers.

"We saw so much poverty concentrated in the Guatemalan highlands," he said, where in rural areas the illiteracy rate is as high as 60 percent, and 90 percent of schools don't have textbooks.

Jeff decided to teach in Guatemala and found he lacked the basic tools to do so. Joseph came back to his job as a marketing representative with IBM in Cincinnati but felt a pull to do something that made a difference. So he took a year-and-a-half leave of absence, during which he traveled to several Third World countries.

"I had known theoretically that poverty existed, but spending time with people, making friends with them changes you."

In 1996, the brothers started the cooperative. In addition to

'I had known theoretically that poverty existed, but spending time with people, making friends with them changes you.'

Joseph Berninger

promoting and raising funds Berninger leads two trips yearly to Guatemala. On each, he takes 35 people from the Greater Cincinnati area for 10 days.

"I see our work as bridge builders. ... We are the mechanism that connects people," he said.

Berninger hopes to pass on those values to his children. He and his wife, Rebecca Guerin, are planning for their 16-month-old son Luke's first trip to Guatemala.

— Lisa Daumeyer, Courier Contributor

Company: Cooperative for Education

Title: Co-founder, director

Family: Wife, Rebecca; son Luke, 16 months

Noteworthy: Berninger's organization, which helps educate Guatemalan school-children, has provided 93,307 textbooks.