

HIGH SCHOOL

Hey Babe, local nonprofit, honors longtime high school baseball coach



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One of the best high school baseball players in state history is still making an impact in the Valley – 50 years later.

Ray Murrillo, the 1974 Arizona high school baseball player of the year who starred at Avondale Agua Fria under legendary coach Wayne Des Combes before starring in college at Arizona, is now president of the Hey Babe local nonprofit. The nonprofit is dedicated to serving Arizona homelessness and the Agua Fria neighborhood and was started in honor of Des Combes.

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Usually, the tiny nonprofit relies on donations to stay afloat. But recently, for the first time, Hey Babe received a \$1,000 grant as part of Arizona Financial Credit Union’s Local Causes program.

“It helps expand our footprint into the community,” said Murrillo, who was a part of Arizona’s 1976 College World Series team before playing in the Chicago White Sox’s minor league system. “The funds will go towards helping our local charities that we’ve chosen. It adds a little bit more validation to how much we try to contribute to the local community. For us, it reiterates that we are legit, that we are in it for the long-term and that we are committed to continuing the legacy of coach Wayne Des Combes in that manner.”

The Agua Fria Food and Clothing bank, Southwest Lending Closet, Homeless Youth Connection, the YMCA and the Avondale Elementary Migrant Student program are some of the biggest charities that Hey Babe works with in the area. Primarily, the group is focused on helping homeless students.

For Murrillo, he's grateful to be working in his current role that is tied to his former coach. The nonprofit is comprised of former players and friends of Des Combes.

"It's a huge honor to be associated with a man of such distinguished notoriety in not only in the athletic world, but in the community," Murrillo said. "To have my name associated with Wayne Des Combes and all the things he accomplished in the community is huge. But most definitely, it's not just my name, it's all of our group. I feel very honored and proud to be elected by my peers in our committee to represent us in that role and do the best I can to help bring forth what we're trying to do."

Murrillo hopes the grant sparks more interest in the nonprofit. AFCU officials said they wanted to target some smaller non-profits for support.

"We receive requests from charitable organizations, nonprofits on an ongoing basis," Jason Paprocki, the executive vice president and chief strategy officer of Arizona Financial Credit Union, said. "And our team, our staff, in the marketing area, identified that there were some really visible charities throughout the Valley that seemed to be highly publicized, received really large grants and donations all the time. But they were starting to become aware of the smaller nonprofits, where a donation of \$1,000 to \$10,000 would go a long ways. We really wanted to find a program that could seek out those that weren't getting the attention and visibility, really the funding of any other donors.

"A lot of the time, what we learn from the nonprofits of the size that we target, is those are make-or-break moments for them. They're really trying to figure out, 'Okay, can I really put enough funds here together to move forward as a viable nonprofit?' So a grant of that size actually makes a difference."

The donations for the program are funded by purchases made on the Local Causes debit card that Arizona Financial Credit Union has created for its members. Each time someone uses the debit card, a donation is made to the program.

