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Paul Vandervoort missed his grown-up children so he did the next best thing.

He became a Big Brother.

The 52-year-old Vandervoort considers his two-year match with Little Brother, Jacob, as one of the most gratifying things he has done in his life.

"I have enjoyed the experience of trying to be a good role model for a young boy," the licensed agent for Clarica Life said modestly.

His contribution to the Little Brother's life hasn't gone unnoticed either by Big Brothers of Hastings and Prince Edward County. Vandervoort was chosen the Big Brother of the Year for 2002-2003 and presented with the award at the United Way agency's annual appreciation dinner.

"Paul's friendship, dedication and support made all the difference in the world to his Little Brother and to the agency," case-worker Amy Fetterly said of Vandervoort.

Vandervoort, in turn, said he was "surprised and humbled" to receive the award.

"All Big Brothers do a great job and are so important in their Little Brothers' lives. I am just glad to have had a part to play in a boy's life."

Even though the match ended this past summer — when Jacob and his family moved out-of-province, Vandervoort stays in constant touch with him.

"We write letters and talk on the phone. And I'm very happy and so is Jacob that he is playing hockey, scoring some goals and having fun doing it," he said.

The Thorncliffe Drive resident is still

considering becoming a Big Brother to another youngster "because I enjoy helping the kids." But, for now, he is content volunteering for the organization in their special outings with Little Brothers who are still waiting to be matched.

The world of finance is Vandervoort's other passion. He is starting his 25th year in the financial field, both in banking and financial planning.

He was born in Stirling and raised in Campbellford. The Vandervoort family name has been in the former Sidney Township since the early 1800s.

After graduating from Campbellford High School in 1970, he enrolled at the University of Guelph. He married Patricia in 1972 and left university studies shortly afterwards to join the Royal Bank of Canada in Hamilton.

Vandervoort spent 10 years in administration and loans with the bank.

"I was in seven branches in 10 years so you got used to moving," he said.

He left the Royal Bank in 1982 to pursue a career in petroleum management in Guelph. He went to work for United Co-op of Ontario and spent the next five years in

management and sales before transferring to the Foxboro Co-op as area manager for petroleum.

Administrative changes within the Co-op forced Vandervoort to return to the financial industry that he already knew well. He joined Mutual Life of Canada — now Clarica — in Belleville in September of 1989 and has remained a licensed agent specializing in wealth management, health insurance and group benefits.

He is currently working to complete his certified financial planner designation.

"It's been a rewarding and challenging career which has the benefits of self-employment and their ability to truly help someone achieve their financial goals," Vandervoort said.

The Vandervoorts are empty-nesters. Their three children, Dan, Eric and Linda, are living on their own "and there are no grandchildren yet, just granddogs and grandcats which we have to babysit the odd time," he laughed.

Vandervoort approached the Big Brothers organization in March of 2001 because he had some spare time on his hands and wanted to help youth. He became a Big Brother Oct. 4 to seven-year-old Jacob who had moved here from out-of-province.

One of the reasons behind their match was their love of sports, especially hockey.

"He liked fishing too and I have a boat," he said.

Vandervoort said he enjoyed his match with Jacob before it ended over the summer

"It was really gratifying to see a smile on Jacob's face and see him grow and learn. His self-esteem grew and he even spoke at the United Way kickoff for the 2002 campaign. It's also very gratifying to see someone happy again and enjoy life and having fun again."

Vandervoort said being a Big Brother is a huge commitment.

"It only takes a few hours a week to take a Big Brother to events and have fun and be there for them. But it's well worth it."

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