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ONE CHILD AT A TIME

BOYS & GIRLS CLUB GROWS TO

MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS

BY BRANDI SCHLOSSBERG | PHOTOS BY ALICIA SANTISTEVAN

THE CHANCE TO PLAY BASKETBALL brought Felix Cox to the Boys & Girls Club of Truckee Meadows when he was 12 years old. Soon, Cox became a regular at the club — and not just on the court.

“At first, I was coming two or three times a week, just for basketball,” he says. “But, the more involved I got, the more I realized the club was the place you could go to do just about anything.”

From homework help, leadership training, and art classes, to free hot meals and assistance meeting other basic needs, the mission of the Boys & Girls Club is to enhance quality of life for children in our community.

For Cox, it was the connections he made and the “comfort zone” he found at the club that made the biggest impact. Today, he is a freshman at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas with plans to attend law school.

“The relationships you build, not only with the kids but

also the staff members, they influence you in a positive way and help you reach your potential,” Cox says. “It’s like an extended family, and even though I’m six-and-a-half hours away now, it’s still my home.”

Now, the Boys & Girls Club is set to offer a second home and comfort zone to even more local children. This spring, the club will open the new 55,000-square-foot William N. Pennington Facility, which is expected to serve more than 3,000 kids and increase the club’s membership by nearly 30 percent.

REACHING WEST RENO

Running programs in 13 schools, one community center, and five stand-alone buildings, the Boys & Girls Club of Truckee Meadows counted 11,000 members last year. The club’s primary site is the 80,000-square-foot Donald W. Reynolds Facility on East Ninth Street, which welcomes as up to 1,000 children each day.

“These big buildings have a really strong influence on the people living within a three-mile ring,” says Mike Wurm, who

Left to right: Amariah, 12; Roxy, 12; Jose, 11; Angel, 11; Jaysha, 11 and Yaxary, 11

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COVER

has been with the Boys & Girls Club of Truckee Meadows for the past 18 years, serving as chief professional officer for the past eight.

Located on Foster Drive, across from Reno High School, the new Pennington Facility sits on the former site of the YMCA. Within a three-mile ring are more than 25,000 school-age children, according to the Boys & Girls Club.

“When the Y closed down, that created a huge void,” Wurm says. “What we’ve tried to do is pick up the parts that fit our mission — we were trying to find a way to get into that neighborhood.”

Last summer, the Reno City Council voted to donate the former YMCA site to the Boys & Girls Club, paving the way for the club to reach the youth of west Reno.

“We did a survey early on and found that there were around 3,000 or 4,000 children within a mile radius that had no after-school activities or places to be,” says Leo Bergin, a Boys & Girls Club board member and leader of fundraising efforts for the Pennington Facility. “The financial status of that region shows that about 40 percent of the population is living below the poverty level.”

In an effort to get a west Reno branch of the Boys & Girls Club up and running, Bergin met with trustees of the William N. Pennington Foundation. He discussed the need for youth services to replace those that disappeared when the YMCA closed down after 50 years on Foster Drive.

In response, the Pennington Foundation — formed by gaming pioneer William N. Pennington to benefit Northern Nevada — contributed \$9 million for the construction of a new Boys & Girls Club at the Foster Drive location.

The club went on to raise the rest of the funds needed to complete and also operate the Pennington Facility, through donations from other foundations and several large individual gifts. Fundraising efforts to strengthen the sustainability of the west Reno club continue, including the Brick by Brick campaign, which allows donors to purchase bricks that will compose the walkway of the Pennington Facility.



The Boys & Girls Club of Truckee Meadows Annual Awards Banquet takes place at the Silver Legacy Resort Casino Nov. 7. The event honors 2013 Distinguished Service Award Winner Leo Bergin for leading fundraising efforts for the club's William N. Pennington Facility, set to open in spring 2014. For more information or tickets, visit www.bgctm.org.

‘THE CLUB SAVES LIVES’

Inside the Pennington Facility, children will have access to diverse programs and services, from professionally staffed classrooms, technology areas, and social centers to art rooms, sports leagues, and a full commercial kitchen that serves well-rounded meals.

“I’m excited about the ability to feed these children and to provide them with computer labs and a place to get their homework done,” Bergin says. “I’m excited to foster their interest in sports or any other activity — ceramics, chess, boxing — whatever they want to do.”

Hug High School senior Katie Harrison has been a member of the Boys & Girls Club for close to a decade, taking part in programs that range from choir and dance to character-building classes and college-application assistance.

“The biggest benefit I’ve gained from being a member of the club is self-respect — they teach you how to become a better person,” Harrison says. “I feel like the club saves lives, because instead of being out on the street, you go to the club and make friends and learn about right and wrong.”

In the past year, connections at the Boys & Girls Club helped Harrison land an internship working with a local physical therapist. Upon graduation, she plans to go to school to study athletic training and sports medicine.

According to Bergin, seeing young adults like Harrison succeed is what inspires his dedication to the Boys & Girls Club of Truckee Meadows.

“When I became involved as a board member, I thought if we could just save one child a year, it was worth it,” he says. “Then I learned that we weren’t saving just one, we were saving many, many of them.”



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