

CATCH THE VISION



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF AMERICA**



CATCH THE VISION CAMPAIGN

When the Boys & Girls Club of McAlester, Oklahoma set out to raise more than \$2 million to build a new athletic complex, “challenge” became an integral theme of their campaign. It wasn’t that the goal was insurmountable – it was because throughout the life of the “Catch the Vision” campaign, friends of the Club continually *challenged* one another to rise to the occasion.

The Board of Directors set a \$2.5 million goal, but everyone understood that such an undertaking was new territory for their town of 18,000. The Boys & Girls Club of McAlester in Southeast Oklahoma has a service area of 37,000, and serves as much more than the area recreation center. The Club is a safe haven in which children and teens learn and play in a fun, structured and supervised environment. While McAlester enjoys many of the advantages of small town life – a close-knit community, low crime rates, active citizenry – it is not immune to life’s serious challenges.

“We have a society of latch-key kids,” says Board President Steve Brock. “It’s not just an issue of poorer families. It’s across the board. These kids come home from school and no one’s there. No one to help with homework, no one to talk to about how the day went. The staff members at the Club realize the critical role they play.”

According to Brock the results are visible. “You can see it in the kids’ faces when they walk through the door after school. They run up to the adults on staff to tell them about a test they took or something that happened in school. It’s truly a mentoring relationship.”

In 2002, 1,600 children took part in the Club’s sports programs. Thousands more took advantage of at least one of the many other programs offered: after-school tutoring and homework assistance, a pregnancy prevention curriculum, computer activities and summer programs. The Club’s supportive atmosphere (the staff-to-child ratio is around 1:9)



offers children a place where they can enjoy themselves – free from the onslaught of the negative peer pressure associated with tobacco, drugs and alcohol.

Not surprisingly, more and more kids were showing up at the Club to participate in programs and activities. The existing facility could not support the increasing interest and need in the community. Meeting this challenge became a priority.



The first challenge came in just months after the board retained the professional fundraising counsel of Hartsook Companies in early 2000. A leadership gift was required to launch the campaign. During the campaign assessment, Hartsook president, Robert Swanson, identified a board member to provide such a gift and set the pace for other board gifts. Al Horton, board member and past president of Boys & Girls Club of McAlester, offered a matching challenge gift of \$300,000 if the other 22 board members, and any past presidents, would give cumulative gifts of the same. That challenge grant was achieved with 100 percent board participation.

By early 2002, additional challenge grants came from the J. G. Puterbaugh Foundation of McAlester and the J. E. and L. E. Mabee Foundation of Tulsa, Oklahoma. To receive Puterbaugh's \$625,000 gift and Mabee's \$250,000 grant, the Club was required to secure the remaining \$900,000 of the campaign goal. The challenges were met within 12 months and in the spring of 2003 more than \$2.4 million in gifts and pledges had been secured.

Co-chair Cindy Carr described the campaign as "... a lot of work ... but to know we are helping to build the character of McAlester youth for the next 40 years as we build this athletic complex and endowment, is very rewarding and very motivating."

She added, "It's so important for these kids to have a place to go – a place where they can enjoy positive social interaction in a structured environment. It's touching to know they look forward to being at the Club."

With only one indoor basketball court in their existing facility, team play and practice was hamstrung. In contrast, the new facility will house six courts and allow for practice, games, tournaments and special events. Not only will the sports complex provide for expanded programs in basketball, it also will include indoor batting cages, indoor soccer and specialized teen programs.

"If the Boys & Girls Club were not here it would be a very sad thing for these kids," said Tony Edwards, campaign co-chair. "This campaign makes a big difference in the community and in children's lives."



"Sometimes you just have to be simple-minded enough to take direction," said Chris Martin, McAlester Club's executive director. "Robert was terrific at laying it out for us, explaining it and then getting us to do it. We learned to take the guidance and counsel and it worked for us. You see the results."

Highs and lows were experienced during the final year of the campaign. Said Carr, "You get so close to goal and the last bit feels like the hardest part of the campaign. Tony Edwards, my co-chair, was a huge asset. He stayed positive. He knows everyone in McAlester and is well-liked which helped open doors for us. Other committee members participated in the process as well. It was a team effort."

In the end, the organization secured \$2.7 million in gifts and pledges on an original goal of \$2.5 million. The additional funds allowed for higher quality construction which, in turn, would require less building maintenance.

With the land and building paid for, groundbreaking was underway on the new 41,000-square-foot multi-purpose field house. Said Brock, "Our first ideas about the facility started out as drawings on a napkin during a board retreat. After speaking with an architect, our initial goal looked short. We



Left to right: Fred Ettner, Mark Derichsweiler, Steve Brock (Board President), Cliff House, Roger Otis, Cindy Carr (Campaign Co-Chair), Al Horton (Honorary Campaign Chair), Robert Swanson, Tony Edwards (Campaign Co-Chair), Chris Martin (Executive Director).

could have shrunk the building to fit the budget, but instead we chose to make our budget fit the building.

“If I were to throw out a guess about where we’d be without Hartsook Companies’ advice and counsel, I can honestly say, I don’t think we’d ever have reached \$1 million. We wouldn’t have had the confidence to go out and ask for major gifts,” said Brock.

Added Carr, “Swanson’s input made our campaign. He gave us strategies and vision. Without that, we would have thought in nickels and dimes, or at the most, \$100 and \$500 gifts.

“We knew what we’d done for the community. We just didn’t know how well everyone would respond. Now, we’ll be able to host



tournaments and provide more programs. Our success and growth will mean growth for McAlester.”

Said Martin, “At first, asking for big gifts was a challenge, but we learned to do it. When we remembered why we were asking – for the boys and girls – it was easier than many of us thought it would be. I’ve spent a lot of years with the Club, and it was very satisfying to see people respond to the need.”

The growth of McAlester is but another in a long line of challenges the community and the Club faced as it pursued its first campaign in 22 years. The successful campaign is proof that the town of McAlester, Oklahoma truly “caught the vision” and met the challenges presented by the volunteer leaders and staff of the Boys & Girls Club.

About the author – Denise Rhoades is a free-lance writer living in Newton, Kan. Denise has worked on several projects for Hartsook Companies and regularly writes campaign case statements and articles for Hartsook clients. For more information about Hartsook Companies, Inc., call 316.630.9992 or visit www.hartsookcompanies.com.

