

White City Boys and Girls Clubs will reopen with stronger support

By JONEL ALECCIA
Mail Tribune

WHITE CITY - After more than a year, doors at the Boys and Girls Clubs site here will reopen Feb. 4 - and Dick Hanlin is determined they won't be closed again.

The director of the agency that recently merged chapters in Jackson and Josephine counties says more staff, more resources and more stability will characterize the revamped center offering after-school and vacation care.

Between 50 and 100 elementary-age children are expected to sign up immediately for after-school programs that run from 2:30 to 6 p.m. weekdays, with early-release care beginning at 1 p.m. Wednesdays.

"It's a fresh start," said Hanlin, who estimates some 500 kids ages 6 to 18 will use the center annually. "Its chances for sustainability are great."

Circumstances that forced the Jackson County chapter to close the program in December 2000 have been addressed by the July merger, which backs the center with a more than \$1 million annual budget and extensive experience, Hanlin said.

"They bit off way too much," Hanlin said of the smaller agency. "They were too eager to say 'yes.'"

Charlie Hamilton, a former and present board member of both agencies, agreed.

"I think we expanded too quickly on all aspects," he said. "Our intent was great, to serve as many kids as possible - let's go, let's go, let's go - but a little fiscal conservatism would have been helpful," he said.

The site was closed when a canceled bingo concession forced an \$80,000 shortfall and the Jackson County chapter couldn't cover the gap.

That's all changed, thanks to new management and an influx of community support, said Hanlin. The agency recently received several grants that will fund the center's \$100,000 annual budget from the Gordon Elwood Foundation, the White City Community Improvement Association, the Rural Investment Fund, Cascade Shopping Center, Avista and Crater Title.

More than \$50,000 in donated improvements, including fencing, field construction and equipment, have been contributed by Boise Cascade, Trust Management Services of Waldport, Suncrest Homes and S & B James Construction.

"Nobody has sat down with us and said 'no,'" Hanlin said.

As a result, the center will feature improved surroundings, including a technology center, a creative arts room and a fenced playing field. Site director Roger Brown will supervise three staff members and several volunteers, more than doubling available supervision. Fees for the program will be reduced to an annual membership of \$15, plus \$25 for summer care, with a \$50 cap per family.

Many community leaders were dismayed at the closure of the building funded through a \$550,000 community development block grant. Technically, Jackson County retains ownership of the building, while the Eagle Point School District owns the land on which it stands. The Boys and Girls Clubs recently signed an agreement to lease the building from the district for \$1 a year.

The reopening is a relief to those familiar with the need for childcare in the White City area. Mark Orndoff, deputy director of Jackson County human services, has worked in the area and knows the need for structured activities.

"I was amazed at the number of kids who don't have anything to do," he said. "Anything that we could do to build capacity out there to help those kids, we're for."

For information about the center, call 830-7623 or 479-5258. Reach reporter JoNel Aleccia at 776-4465, or e-mail jaleccia@mailtribune.com

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