ABOUT THE BOOK

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When Helen Nelson accepted the Memorial position in the 1940s, her white colleagues chided her, asking, "Why would you teach there? The kids are uneducable. Throwaways. They won't amount to anything."

Memorial Principal William J. Oakes, a white man, did not agree with that derogatory assessment. Nor did the Boys Club of San Diego's enthusiastic early supporters. Key elected officials, influential civic leaders and philanthropists joined together to galvanize construction of the Club. They helped propel it forward as this first Boys Club in San Diego County surmounted obstacle after obstacle in its struggle to survive.

In segregated San Diego, the Boys Club became a rare and shining beacon of integration; a mixture of blacks, whites, Hispanics, Filipinos and recent immigrants from around the world. They were united by poverty and society's marginalization of them.

Outside the Club, financial hardship, broken homes and suffocating racism beat down the kids daily. Inside their safe harbor, external issues disappeared. Fun and friendship beckoned. Opportunities to grow and achieve uplifted the kids daily.


Inside are their stories and the story of benevolent San Diegans who went against the grain to help them and hundreds of thousands of boys and girls succeed over the past 75 years.

The Great Depression. World War II. Pernicious, pervasive bigotry. A dire scarcity of materials, men and—most alarmingly—money for construction. Internecine squabbles. An unexpected change of architects mid-stream. A frantic, last-minute search for a suitable director. And, oh no—just when the initial facility of its kind in the region was scheduled to open, the still-unmet need for a chain link fence required to encircle this edifice embedded in a high-crime, gang-infested area.

How did the Boys Club of San Diego manage to get built in 1942? And how, operating initially with a skeleton staff and sans adequate furnishings, combined with ever-present monetary challenges, was it able to begin turning boys into men?

The compelling tale of Historical Landmark No. 1114, the oldest continuously operating Boys & Girls Clubhouse in Southern California, is a powerful story in which all San Diegans can take pride.
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AGAINST THE GRAIN
AGAINST THE GRAIN

The Story of the
First Boys Club in San Diego County,
Established in 1942

by Marilyn Campbell
We greatly appreciate the many people who contributed their time, memories and photos regarding what was originally known as the Boys Club of San Diego. We could not have created AGAINST THE GRAIN without their input. We are also thankful for the assistance of Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater San Diego staff: Michelle Malin, Ricardo Sandoval, Scott Lamb and Jon Greene. A special thank you goes to the Oakes Alumni Association, whose members provided a wealth of vintage material and pointed the direction to in-depth research.

Information has been sourced from news publications, historical documents, personal interviews, written recollections and anecdotal items. Sources are listed in the Bibliography.

We have made every effort to ascertain correct facts and figures, and to verify that all information contained herein is accurate. If we have missed the mark in any instance, we sincerely apologize.

Funding for this book was provided by the generosity of an anonymous donor.

Publisher: Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater San Diego. SDYouth.org
Book Design: Tara Lee Torburn

ISBN #978-1-5323-2073-6

FIRST EDITION
Printed December 2016

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In 1946, I was a ten-year-old troubled kid from a broken home who could not get my bearings. One day, I happened to walk by the Boys Club of San Diego, which had opened in 1942 on Marcy Avenue in Logan Heights.

A staff member came up to me and said in a friendly voice, “Hi son! How’re you doing?” My life began to change for the better that day.

I hope you enjoy reading about how the Club changed my life and the lives of so many other kids.

AC Miller
The Boys Club Code was written by Aaron H. Fahringer, an executive with the Boys Clubs of America who was actively involved with the establishment of Boys Clubs on the West Coast created during the mid-1930s through the mid-1950s, including the Boys Club of San Diego in 1942. In his honor, the Boys & Girls Clubs of La Habra, founded in 1955, named the one-address avenue on which it is sited Fahringer Way.
Dedication

AGAINST THE GRAIN is dedicated to all the civic champions who had the vision, passion and tenacity to make the Boys Club of San Diego a reality; to persevere in the face of multiple challenges during the Club’s embryonic years; and to expand, despite continuing financial difficulties, from one modest Clubhouse in an economically depressed neighborhood to the current Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater San Diego organization. It is dedicated to all the children who have participated in their Clubs and to all the adults who have served these children – our children – with incredible energy and empathy.

CHANGING LIVES truly takes a village; in this case, the San Diego community.
Foreword

Many movements that changed the human condition were started by small groups, whose causes were neither popular nor politically correct at the time.

William Wilberforce, a member of the English Parliament, joined a group of anti-slave-trade activists. It took them 20 years to achieve passage of the Slave Trade Act of 1807 and 26 more years for passage of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833.

Susan B. Anthony began campaigning for women’s rights in 1851. She was harshly ridiculed and accused of trying to destroy the institution of marriage. She organized an association to campaign for equal rights for women. In 1872, she was arrested for illegally voting in an election and convicted in a widely publicized trial. In 1920, 14 years after her death, the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution gave women the right to vote.

During the 1930s, juvenile delinquency was a major problem in the Logan Heights area of San Diego. To combat this problem, school principal William J. Oakes recruited a group of local businessmen to help him organize a Boys Club. While serving poor, disenfranchised boys was seen as a worthy project, in an era of segregation the mixing of nationalities was not acceptable to many citizens. This group went against the grain to establish an organization where boys of all ethnicities would be given equal access to hope and opportunity.

Since this humble beginning, the organization has extended its services to girls and now serves over 25,000 youth annually in numerous locations throughout San Diego County. Society is indebted to these founding fathers and the countless donors, volunteers and staff – both local and national – who have changed the lives of boys and girls for four generations.

Danny Sherlock
President & CEO
Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater San Diego
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Bordered on the south and west by Interstate 5, on the east by Interstate 15, and on the north by Imperial Avenue, Logan Heights in the 1930s, like other communities of color throughout the United States, was at the intersection of poverty and despair.
Preface

On August, 16, 1936, as German Fuehrer Adolf Hitler watched the Olympic Games in Berlin, fleet-footed African-American runner Jesse Owens, a member of what Hitler derisively called “an alien race,” shattered records. He won the 100- and 200-meter dash and the running broad jump while helping the American team capture gold in the 400-meter relay.

Heralded as the world’s fastest athlete, Jesse Owens showed Nazis and the world what “non-Aryans” could achieve. His accomplishments were a source of pride to all Americans, especially African-Americans, who lived in an era in which bigotry and inequality plagued their everyday lives. But it did not define them.

During that same summer of 1936, a seed was quietly planted in the predominately African-American Logan Heights neighborhood of San Diego, California. Over the next six years, with constant tending, the vision would blossom into a beautiful, red-brick clubhouse that opened in 1942 to welcome an ethnically diverse membership of boys ages 7-18. The initial fee: one dollar or less per year.

In an era that discouraged and in some cases forbade the “mixing” of races, how did this remarkable organization come about? Through people who were unafraid to go against the grain of entrenched prejudices and preconceptions.

Propelled by an indefatigable junior high school principal, supported by civic leaders and philanthropists, and staffed by people who cared deeply about the kids, the Boys Club of San Diego provided members with a home-away-from-home and a path toward achievement in many fields. It epitomized the ideal upon which our country was built that anyone who works hard can attain the American Dream.
Setting the Stage …
Life in the 1920s and 1930s
The Great Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s took its toll on all Americans, but was harsher on poor people of color. Institutionalized segregation severely limited opportunities for education, recreation, employment, housing, prosperity and overall quality of life.

In the South, due to Jim Crow laws, black women and men only two or three generations removed from slavery were forced to pass unreasonable “literacy” tests – such as reciting the entire Preamble of the U.S. Constitution – before being allowed to exercise their right to vote.

Racism also reigned in California. Discriminatory housing covenants were commonplace. Popular singer Nat King Cole had to use a white intermediary to purchase his mansion in L.A.’s exclusive Hancock Park, then stand his ground when white neighbors (many of whom probably adored his music) tried to force him to leave. Prominent architect Paul Revere Williams, whose space-age Theme Building at Los Angeles International Airport became an instant landmark, learned to draw plans upside-down for white clients across the table who refused to sit next to him.

Anaheim, now the longtime home of Disneyland, was far from the “happiest place on earth” for blacks. The city, like much of Orange County, was dominated politically by the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), which staged massive rallies and patrolled the streets garbed in trademark white robes and hoods. At one point in the 1920s, KKK politicians held four of the five Anaheim city council seats.

Mexican-Americans in Southern California also suffered from separate and unequal facilities. They were relegated to “Mexican schools” and not allowed in “white” areas of public spaces.

SAN DIEGO, AKA MISSISSIPPI WITHOUT LYNCHING

Between the late 1920s and early 1940s, as the Oakes Boys Club underwent a long gestation and challenging birth, San Diego was not a friendly place for African-Americans to live and work. According to a 1988 Journal of San Diego History article on community activist Rebecca Craft, “African-Americans were denied full participation in San Diego – economically, politically, socially.”

Although there was no “Whites Only” or “Colored Only” signage as in the South, blacks could not eat at numerous restaurants, sleep in the better hotels or sit with whites in theaters. They could not catch a cab in most parts of the city; black-owned cabs were restricted to Logan Heights.

In the military, they could aspire only to lower-level positions. In industry, they often could not get a job above janitor. No matter how stellar their qualifications, they were not allowed to teach in public schools, or join the city’s fire or police department.

When Rebecca Craft and her colleagues went to speak with Police Chief Arthur Hill in the 1920s to encourage him to hire a black policeman, the pridefully bigoted Chief said, “If it’s left with me, there’ll never be a n _ _ _ _ r on the police force in
Pictured here are early Boys Club members with their swim gear in suitcases, on their way to “Black Saturday” at the YMCA pool.
San Diego.” In 1931, Hill experienced a change of heart and hired a black policeman, Jasper Davis, who experienced overt acts of racism from his colleagues, some of whom resigned rather than serve with him.

Black San Diegans frequently referred to their hometown as “Mississippi Without Lynching” and “Redneck Capital of the West.” It was dangerous to drive after dark through towns such as Coronado or La Jolla; the very towns in whose homes many blacks worked. It was a perilous place to need medical attention, since all but one hospital emergency room turned away people of color.

A history of the San Diego NAACP written by San Diego State University Librarian Robert Fikes in 2012 paints a scathing picture of life for blacks in the early decades of the 20th century. The history carries an intentionally ironic title: “The Struggle for Equality in 'America's Finest City.'” It explains that amid a wonderful climate, beautiful flowers, “star-eyed palms and dark fingers of land pointing seaward,” was a bleak place where “colored people were not allowed … to drink water in drugstores, nor rent bathing suits at any bathing house or beach in this city.”

The history delineates a sad reality in direct opposition to the pretense of racial tolerance San Diego leaders were wont to proclaim. It cites actor Gregory Peck’s recollection “that as a child living in La Jolla he witnessed a cross burning on the lawn of a house rented by a black family.”

In 1923, a black family in Ocean Beach refused to move despite threats delivered at gunpoint. Soon after, their “home burned to the ground as they fled for their lives.”

Slowly, thanks to the dogged efforts by stalwarts such as Rebecca Craft and organizations such as the NAACP, life and opportunities in San Diego began to improve. In 1942, the same year that the Oakes Club opened, the school board

**LOGAN HEIGHTS**

One of San Diego’s oldest residential communities, Logan Heights was named after Illinois politician John Alexander Logan, who as a U.S. Congressman in 1871 proposed legislation to create a transcontinental railroad with its western terminus in San Diego. The railroad never came to be, but a street in central San Diego was named in his honor in 1881, and the description grew to encompass the entire area.

According to historian Karen L. Huff, Black Historical Society of San Diego, African-Americans originally settled downtown. Over the early decades of the 20th century, San Diego’s black population began migrating to Logan Heights. By 1926, six of the seven black churches in the city were located in Logan Heights, which also was home to a sizable Mexican-American population.

By 1940, a considerable African-American population and more than 15% of all Mexican-Americans in San Diego resided in Logan Heights. Smatterings of minorities also lived quietly under the radar in off-limit areas.

Largely restricted to areas like Logan Heights, the black community became a self-sufficient enclave of enterprise. Many industrious people lived and operated successful businesses there. Among its famous citizens was Dr. Jack Kimbrough (namesake of Kimbrough Elementary School), one of the first black dentists in San Diego. His son Alden attended the Boys Club and became a prominent collector of Afro-American art.

The neighborhood also produced Armando Rodriguez. As detailed in his memoir, *From the Barrio to Washington: an Educator’s Journey*, Dr. Rodriguez, born in 1921, migrated as a youngsters

“Starting at age 12, the Club became my daily hangout. Little did I know that my tiny membership card would become my passport to a world I had yet to see – sports, recreational activities, arts and crafts, other social and cultural events. I thank all of those who had the vision to start the first Boys Club in San Diego, which guided and inspired me on my trip from boyhood to manhood.”

— Boys Club Alumnus Ermon Johnson
THE 40 ACRES

The area encircling the Boys Club, Memorial Junior High School, Logan Elementary School, and Memorial Park and Recreation Center was once known as “40 Acres,” referencing the approximate amount of land enclosed. The perimeter of Ocean View Boulevard, 28th Street, Logan Avenue and 30th Street totals about one mile. To many young inhabitants of this lively square block in the 1930s and 1940s, that today reflects the largely Latino population residing in cozy vintage homes, some painted in colorful pastels, 40 Acres was a magical place.

But the area had a dark underbelly of crime that made it decidedly un-bucolic. One early Club member was often roughed up by gang members on his way to school. Another elementary school student was forced to shell over his daily lunch money to a bully. One young boy avoided problems by walking the 40 Acres between home, school and Club with older friends, including the Club kid who would become one of America’s greatest athletes: football and boxing icon Charles Powell.
from Mexico to San Diego and persevered to become the first Hispanic principal of a San Diego secondary school and president of East Los Angeles College. He ultimately served in our nation’s Capital under four U.S. Presidents and was instrumental in developing California’s bilingual education program. This eminent educator’s very first teaching assignment came in 1949 at the special behest of Boys Club of San Diego Founder William J. Oakes, who was Principal of Memorial Junior High School when Rodriguez was a student at the school.

Within the Logan Heights community were adolescents striving to grow up under challenging circumstances. Confined to an area with few outlets or opportunities, and with parents working hard to put food on the table, young boys were in need of guidance and support. Nearby recreational facilities were closed if your skin was not the right (white) color. The downtown YMCA banned African-Americans from its pool except for contemptuously designated “Black Saturdays,” when they were allowed to swim while whites disdainfully shunned the pool.

With little to do, some boys were tempted into unlawful activities. For many years in the 1930s and early 1940s, Logan Heights had one of the highest juvenile delinquency rates in all of San Diego.

That sad statistic would begin to change in Fall 1942 when the doors of opportunity opened to all boys at 2930 Marcy Avenue.
Part One: Planting the Seed
1927-1942
CHAPTER 1

An Unremarkable Beginning to an Exceptional Journey
San Diego Boys’ Club

The boy problem has always been with us, puzzling to adults and too often a sore question with the boys themselves. But the boy problem is a simple one, though when neglected it has a tendency to become complicated and a source of a lot of grief. It is the problem of providing suitable activities to absorb the excess energies, mental and physical, that growing boys generate in varying degree, but which all of them have to get out of their systems by one means or another. The happy solution of the boy problem is found when excess energies are turned to good account, for the benefit and betterment of the boys and the peace and welfare of the communities in which they live.

So it was with widespread approval that San Diegans read in the news columns last Friday that a civic-minded group of our leading business and professional men has been working for several months on a project to establish at a suitable center a Boys’ Club, as the first San Diego unit in a movement national in scope and represented in some 200 cities from coast to coast. The announced purposes are to provide recreational and vocational facilities for boys and youths whose economic circumstances do not adequately permit these, and to make a substantial community contribution toward character-building.

But, as is always the case in this practical world of ours, we can’t have something for nothing, so a building-fund campaign is now in course of planning and San Diegans will be called upon to contribute, in due course. It is a good cause, as some of us who recall our own boyhood days well know, good for the boys who will benefit directly, and good for the entire community in the better citizens that the Boys’ Club of San Diego is bound to produce.
The 58 pages of meticulously detailed, type-written field reports spanning 1927 to 1951 paint a portrait of a facility for disadvantaged boys – one of the earliest on the West Coast – that struggled to be born, endeavored mightily to survive, and conquered challenge after challenge to ultimately thrive, as have the youth who passed through its doors from 1942 through the present. The reports were written for internal purposes by an unnamed representative of Boys Clubs Federation, which began in 1906 as an East Coast alliance of Boys Clubs.

Along with newspaper clippings and personal recollections, the field reports reveal a compelling saga of the Boys Club of San Diego, which overcame numerous natural and man-made obstacles on its journey to begin turning boys into men.

"NO COMMENTS MADE"

Two years before the October 29, 1929 stock market crash that toppled the United States into the Great Depression, a cryptic first field report entry noted an October 20, 1927 visit from a Club official to San Diego, a military town in Southern California near the U.S./Mexico border. The impetus: potential establishment of a Boys Club in the burgeoning city. The terse notation: “No comments made.”

On December 29th of that year, H.C. MacKay, Jr. of San Diego inquired about affiliation with Boys Clubs Federation. No response was recorded.

No further correspondence was notated for a couple years, but with San Diego’s population approaching 150,000, interest may have been growing behind the scenes. Across the country, Boys Clubs were seen as an antidote to juvenile delinquency, especially among what the “privileged class” often termed “the underprivileged class.”

“The most valuable experience I received at the Club was from my association with diverse ethnic groups. We were all together – whites, blacks, Latinos, Filipinos, Asians – playing and learning. The friends I made and the appreciation I have for that positive multicultural experience remains with me today.”

— Boys Club Alumnus David Woods
SAN DIEGO, Calif.

Oct. 20, 1927 - C.J.A. visited; field report filed; no comments made.

Dec. 20, 1927 - Inquiry from E. L. Meckley, Jr. Citizens of America, 717 Sutter street, acknowledged on this date. This organization asked for affiliation with the BCA.

February 12, 1931 - Visited San Diego, where due to the excellent contact work of Mr. Neubauer, the Res. of Rotary had arranged a very special luncheon at the Athletic Club with a very wonderful setting and a fine group of men. (Names and addresses listed)

(a) Elwood Bailey, Boy Scouts, Scout Headquarters, San Diego, D. H. Edwards, Probation Officer, Court "come, 1008 Columbia, San Diego
(b) Julius Sainwater, Community Chest, Verne Stanfield, Boys "ork Secretary I.O.O.F.
(c) Nat Hall, c/o Mac Kerr "ores Co.,
(d) Al A. Mersk, Shopping News,
(e) June E. Lewis, "reg-Navy Academy, "cille Beach,
(f) William Aarns, Superintendent Playgrounds,
(g) Malcolm Brown, "rin, Roosevelt Jr. "igh School,
(h) W. E. Jones, Medical-Dental Building,
(i) E. C. Anderson, "he Sun"

Those marked (a) are Rotarians and the others were invited because of their connection with scout work.

Mr. "aul W. Edwards, who arranged the luncheon, is the editor of the San Diego Sun, one of the Scripps-Howard papers. I believe, and whose predecessor, a very wealthy man who has just died, was the great promoter of Scouting who left a most remarkable Scout Headquarters in the shape of an Indian Village. The letter of introduction from "rkham of Walt L狡 City to the Chief Scout Executive of San Diego who happened to be a Rotarian was very helpful; the Scout Executive said that the endorsement of "rkham made it look.

--- the need of a Boys' Club was discussed. The Probation Officer gave us first-hand figures to strengthen our story. The group seemed much impressed and Edwards stated afterwards that he had never seen men more interested and he felt sure the Rotary Committee who really had no Boys' work objective would give the Boys' club very serious consideration. This seems to be the group through whom we may find a group to sponsor a Boys' Club when the occasion is right. (A.V. report)

Jan. 7, 1935 - Form letter being sent to Rotary Presidents, sent to Fred L. Amnba. Merely acknowledged by his secretary in his absence.

August, 1936 - In reply to follow up letter, Dr. Island D. Jones, 908 Bank of America Building, asked to remain on mailing list and made inquiry with regard to difference between B.C.A. and T.S.C.A., Scouts, etc. William Aarns, Superintendent of playgrounds, replied to follow-up letter saying "probably no prospect for a Boys' Club". Elwood Bailey, Scout executive, said he was glad to keep in touch with Boys' Club work. Letter addressed to F. H. Edwards, Probation Officer, returned. One address to Nat Hall, "refused.

June, 1936 - Horace D. Taft, Headmaster of the Taft School, Watertown, Connecticut, recently elected to the National Board, while visiting San Diego will attempt to create interest in a Boys' Club project.

December 22, 1936 - Letter received from Mr. William J. Oakley, Principal of

Boys Clubs of America Field Report; initial page.
In 1931, with a geographical range expanding well beyond the East Coast, the national organization renamed itself Boys Clubs of America (BCA). Early that year, San Diego Rotarians hosted a BCA representative at “a special luncheon at the Athletic Club with a wonderful setting and a fine group of men” that included prominent businessmen, a probation officer, Boy Scout and YMCA leaders and others who conducted “boys’ work.” Although BCA seemed eager to establish a presence, San Diego leaders appeared lukewarm.

“PROBABLY NO PROSPECT”

After BCA sent another in a series of inquiries in Summer 1935, it received a curt response: “Probably no prospect for a Boys Club.” Undeterred, a BCA board member from Connecticut visited San Diego in June 1936 and attempted to spark interest, again to no avail.

Seven months later, the concept would ignite, in the form of sparkplug William J. Oakes. The concept would take shape and become a reality. But it would take some time. Six years, in fact.
CHAPTER 2

A Unifying Principal
William J. Oakes.
In an era in which race often drove people apart, Memorial Junior High School (now Memorial Preparatory for Scholars and Athletes) brought folks together. Located in the heart of Logan Heights at 2850 Logan Avenue, the school's student body was comprised primarily of African-Americans and Caucasians, with a growing Mexican-American population as well as other nationalities.

Memorial, part of San Diego City Schools (now San Diego Unified School District), was led by a principal with strong principles: William J. Oakes. Oakes was persistent in pursuing his goal of creating a Boys Club to enrich his students’ lives.

An educator who also held a law degree, Oakes served as Vice Principal of Sherman Elementary School from 1921-1931, and as Principal of Memorial from 1931 until his death in 1953. It would not be until the early 1960s that a black director, Hal Jackson, took the reins of the clubhouse. But in the 1930s, with a white establishment prevailing in San Diego, a Caucasian who felt an empathetic connection to his students of all colors was arguably the right man in the right place at the right time.

As busy as he was running a school and raising a family, Oakes always made time to propel the Club’s creation forward with great perseverance (but not always patience – he was eager to keep the ball rolling and not afraid of speaking his mind to attain his goal). He met with BCA representatives while attending out-of-town conferences, worked late into the night on the project for years, and self-effacingly never sought publicity.

Oakes epitomizes the old saw: “You can accomplish a lot if you don't care who gets the credit.” By contrast, BCA executives appeared quick to get their names, photos and quotes in the paper, frequently taking ownership of

“Principal Oakes started the Boys Club because he believed in us, even though he was white and most of us were African-American. We alumni believe in today’s Club kids, who are predominately Hispanic. Like Mr. Oakes, we don’t see color. We see kids.”

— Boys Club Alumnus
Dean Hancock
Oakes may not have gained publicity, but he did earn the endearing gratitude of Club kids. Dean Hancock, who attended the Club from 1949, when he was eight years old, until 1955, when his family moved out of the area, says, “Principal Oakes taught us a great deal by example. I very much admire what he stood for.”

**A MOMENTOUS DAY**

On December 22, 1936, BCA received a letter from Principal Oakes “asking for literature with reference to the methods and procedures to use in organizing a municipal Boys Club.” Materials were sent, meetings were set up, and the years-long efforts to create a Club was born.

With correspondence mainly by snail-mail and cross-country travel a time-consuming burden, the journey was slow and halting. But field reports show that Oakes was a determined individual who was not deterred by delays.

On February 25, 1937, Oakes reported “good prospects for a club supported by Civitan,” an association of volunteer community service clubs founded in 1917 to build good citizenship. That spring, a high-level BCA representative made a well-received address to San Diego Civitans in which he stressed “that work for under-privileged boys is a patriotic service.”
Boys Clubs of America Field Report; list of potential supporters.
CHAPTER 3

Civic Leaders Unite
In the latter half of 1937, momentum surged, albeit sporadically. Principal Oakes and Civitan President Y. A. Jacques were the “chief promoters” who determined that the optimum location would be close to Memorial Junior High School.

In September 1937, Oakes submitted a list of names, occupations and addresses of 85 potential supporters of a Boys Club, requesting that BCA send literature to each. The list was a Who’s Who of San Diego leadership: judges, bankers, educators, clergymen and businessmen as well as Mayor Percy L. Benbough, City Manager R. W. Flack and Police Chief George Sears.

Oakes had cast his net wide. It would soon widen further to encompass a game-changing, philanthropic couple renowned for their financial support of Boys Clubs in Southern California: San Diegans Arthur C. Anderson and his wife, Gertrude.

**THE SEED TAKES ROOT**

Principal Oakes was a man of bold action and an innovator who was always focused on bettering the lives of his students. At Memorial, he proposed an out-of-the-box way to address attendance and behavioral issues with kids classified as incorrigible troublemakers. Part of the problem, as he saw it, was the daily grind of long school days sitting in a classroom. His solution: exercise.

Oakes galvanized the creation of a last-period regimen of tumbling, gymnastics and wrestling. The unique effort caught the attention of community service organizations, which sponsored teams. According to Memorial teacher Armando Rodriguez, “Suddenly, rather than being the guys who were looked down on, they were the kids being admired.”

Oakes was also a visionary. Even before the Clubhouse site was selected, funding was secured or plans drawn, he asked BCA if it would be practical to have a gymnasium shared in the day by Memorial and at night utilized for Boys Club programs.

As an educator, Oakes was focused on the What, Why, Who, When and How of things. He and his team had determined the What (Boys Club); the Why (to propel adolescent boys from “juvenile delinquency” to “juvenile decency”); the Who (Logan Heights boys); the When (as soon as possible); and the How (through community support and funding from individuals and organizations).

Now that the seed had been planted, BCA swooped in with great alacrity. Information on “How to Organize a Boys Club” was sent to potential supporters. A visit was arranged to existing Boys Clubs in Los Angeles. The San Diego Sheriff’s Department and Civitans committed to working together to help create the Club, which would become part of a national organization comprising at this time more than 350 clubs with a combined membership of more than 300,000 boys.

Perhaps the people and possibilities were going in too many directions simultaneously, or perhaps it was just too early in his estimation, but when approached in February 1939 by BCA, “Mr. Oakes said he did not feel now was the time to form a Boys Club board.” He did, however, emphatically state his preference for “the balance of the land adjacent to Memorial School likely to be purchased by the city.”
Arthur C. and Gertrude H. Anderson.
CHAPTER 4

The Pace Quickens
Leaders Study Plans for Boys' Club Building in Logan Heights

Studying architects' drawing of the proposed Boys' club, for which a fund campaign is to be conducted this month, are, left to right, W. J. Oakes, Memorial Junior High school principal; Wilbur A. Thomas and Arthur C. Anderson. They are among leaders of the group supporting the movement.

Fund Campaign Starts Feb. 18

The idea of a Boys' club to encourage and develop citizenship by providing recreational and vocational facilities now lacking in the city's large southeastern section, has taken such firm hold here that the project is assured of success, according to leaders of the movement.

In the vanguard of the movement are W. J. Oakes, principal of Memorial Junior High school; president of the board of trustees; Wilbur A. Thomas, long identified with the work among juveniles; George A. Scott, chamber of commerce president, chairman of the fund raising campaign; Arthur C. Anderson, philanthropist, and a score of business and professional men.

Check on Progress

With others interested in the project, they met yesterday afternoon to check on progress in organizing volunteers for service in the fund campaign, to be conducted Feb. 18-28. Scott reported that about 200 will aid.

"The object is to give all boys, especially those less privileged, every opportunity to develop many qualities and ambitions," said Thomas. "Under trained leadership, boys will occupy their spare moments with wholesome recreation and absorbing work. The Boys' club is a non-sectarian organization which invites all youths, between 7 and 21, to share its benefits. It will serve a membership up to 2000, accommodating 350 or more in varied activities at one time. We expect soon to announce the location of the site, which will be in the Logan Heights area."
On October 6, 1939, BCA made a defining field report notation: “Learned Mrs. Arthur C. (Gertrude H.) Anderson, 2456 Sixth Ave., at present a generous contributor to the Pasadena BC, was interested in seeing a BC established in SD.”

Arthur and Gertrude Anderson would become the lead donors on the campaign to build the Club and heavily involved in its construction. Even before a single blueprint was created, the Andersons were lauded in local media as “two of the most enthusiastic supporters of the Boys Club.” Mr. Anderson served on the initial Board of Trustees and Mrs. Anderson wielded the shovel at the 1941 Groundbreaking. Their Anderson Trust provided seed money for this facility and many other Boys Clubs throughout Southern California.

Anderson was an accountant, businessman and shrewd investor. Not much is known about their personal lives, both of which ended in the early 1950s. However, the contributions of this generous couple have reverberated in the lives of countless boys and girls for generations.

SYNERGISTIC SUPPORT

In late October 1939, City Planning Engineer Glenn A. Rick initiated a correspondence with BCA regarding “proposed recreational activities in connection with the playfield at Memorial, particularly with regard to the inclusion of a Boys Club.”

The supportive participation Principal Oakes had assiduously sought was tantalizingly on the horizon. In November, Oakes met with high-level city staff, elected officials, Hage’s Ice Cream Company executive and Boys Club aficionado Wilbur A. Thomas, and last but certainly not least, Mr. and Mrs. Anderson. The cost to construct the facility was estimated at $40,000-$50,000. Estimates would continue rising. Ultimately, the facility would cost much more.

“A civic-minded group of leading business and professional men has been working to establish a Boys Club to provide recreational and vocational facilities for youth whose economic circumstances do not adequately permit these, and to make a substantial community contribution toward character-building.”

— 1941 newspaper article
Oakes must have been delighted to bask in the synergy of city and school district officials, business and civic leaders, faith-based organizations, philanthropists and BCA officials working together toward the common goal of positively impacting the lives of his Memorial students of all nationalities.

The pace quickly picked up. A Steering Committee chaired by Oakes was formed. The possibility of obtaining federal funds was considered. Oakes and Arthur Anderson met with the YMCA board and “cleared any feeling of conflict between the two organizations.” The two men wanted to kickstart fundraising by holding “a banquet with prominent people, including movie stars,” fashioned after a recent BCA event in Los Angeles.

As 1939 came to an end, the star-studded banquet was put on hold. The stars certainly seemed to be aligning for the establishment of the Boys Club that Oakes envisioned when he made his first inquiry three years before. The next three years would be replete with incremental triumphs, war, good press, red tape, challenges met, obstacles overcome and new challenges to surmount.
S. D. TO HAVE BOYS’ TOWN; UNIT WILL JOIN NATIONAL CLUB

George Scott Heads Group to Raise Building Fund

San Diego is to have a Boys’ Town.

Attacking locally the nation-wide challenge of “how to keep American boys American,” a volunteer board of trustees met yesterday in the U.S. Grant hotel to lay plans for a campaign to raise funds to build a modest, but well-equipped Boys’ club building in San Diego.

William W. Oakes, Memorial Junior High school principal, was chosen president of the organizational board; George A. Scott, chamber of commerce president, was appointed chairman of the building fund campaign.

SITE BEING SELECTED

Negotiations are under way to obtain a site in the Logan Heights district. The location probably can be announced in a few days, Oakes said.

The board of trustees and the campaign committee, being appointed by Scott, will meet Friday afternoon at 4 in the assembly room at Walker’s department store. Plans for the money-raising campaign will be completed at that time.

“Our decision to have a Boys’ club in San Diego came after a long period of careful planning, investigation of the need and consultation with the Boys’ Club of America,” Oakes said. “Herbert Hoover is chairman of the national board of directors and this national organization has been aiding the local committee for the last year in the San Diego survey.”

TO BE ONE OF 300 CLUBS

The proposed Boys’ club will be non-sectarian, serving all boys between 7 and 21, regardless of race, creed or economic status. It will cooperate with the home, the church and the school, in that it is to be open, during the school year, after school hours. It will not be open on Sundays. It will be a member of the national organization, comprising 300 clubs from coast to coast.

The following other San Diegans are serving on the first board of trustees; Walther A. Thomas, first vice president; Scott, second vice president; Irving E. Friedman, secretary; Arthur C. Wells, treasurer; trustees; Arthur C. Anderson, T. Malcolm Brown, Jackson T. Butterfield, Judge William Paxton Cary, William S. Cowling, Friedman, Jay L. Gould, Dr. Leo L. Glenn, C. Earl Guadagni, the Rev. Wallace M. Hamilton, Paul J. Harley, Allen S. Klauber, Emil Klicka, Harley B. Knox, John T. Martin, Oakes, Scott, Don W. Sharp, Sam G. Snyder, Phil D. Swing, Thomas, Chet A. Van Dusen, Michael J. Walsh and Arthur C. Wells.

THE PACE QUICKENS
CHAPTER 5

Plans Move Forward
San Diego Boys’ Club Planned; Fund Campaign To Be Staged

A movement of national scope, soon will embrace San Diego through the efforts of a large group of civic-minded citizens who have dedicated themselves to the task of establishing a Boys’ club here. Primary purpose of the proposed club is to develop citizenship by providing recreational and vocational facilities for youths who are being left behind in the progress due to circumstances are less privileged than others but it will be open to all boys regardless of race, creed or economic status.

Working quietly for several months, during which the need for such project was studied thoroughly, leaders of the undertaking perfected an organization of business and professional men who accepted the opportunity to serve as a board of trustees, and also formed the nucleus of a campaign committee to raise the necessary funds.

William J. Oakes, Memorial Junior High School principal, is president of the board, and George A. Scott, chamber of commerce president, is chairman of the building fund campaign.

Logan Heights Projected Site

Site of the projected club is in Logan Heights. Oakes said its location cannot be disclosed until negotiations are completed.

Scott said cooperation is being given by the Boys’ Club of America, chairman of whose national board is Herbert Hoover.

“In larger communities it has long been established that outlets such as Boys’ clubs meet definite needs,” Scott added. “San Diego’s population is approaching the quarter million mark, and all indications point to continuing increase. Community growth such as this brings certain problems, important among which is providing means for boys in areas lacking character-building facilities to gainfully utilize their idle time.

Member of National Body

“The Boys’ club which we plan will be a member of the national organization, which now includes 350 units in 200 cities from coast to coast. Boys between 7 and 21 will be eligible. The club will be open after school hours and during vacation periods, but not on Sundays. Its activities will tie into the home, the church and the school.”

In the fund campaign, Oakes will head five divisions of six teams each. Three division leaders already have been named, John Martin, Don Shira and Earl Gustafson. The other two divisions will have women as leaders.

Chairmen Listed

Assisting in the campaign will be these chairman: Wilbur A. Thomas, special gifts; Arthur C. Wells, auditing; Arnold Klaus, donor; Sid Fuller, radio, and Irving E. Friedman, arrangements.


The fund campaign, Scott said, will be conducted Feb. 18-28. One of a number of organization meetings planned in the interim will be held today at 9:30 p.m., on the eighth floor of Walker’s, with members of the campaign committee and board of trustees attending.
San Diego Leaders Receive $5000 for Youth Project

A check for $5000 was presented to Boys club officers yesterday, those taking part in the ceremony being (left to right) Ed Pierce, A. H. Fahringer, national organization group area director; Wilbur A. Thomas, vice president, W. J. Oakes, president of the San Diego group; A. C. Anderson, Mrs. Anderson.
As President of the incipient Board of Trustees, Oakes amassed a strong Finance Committee headed by Arthur Anderson and featuring Wilbur A. Thomas and George A. Scott, then Vice President of Walker's Department Store in downtown San Diego.

Named Walker's when it opened in 1935 and renamed Walker-Scott in the 1950s, it was the best department store in town and one of the few that made black customers feel welcome. It was the first major store in San Diego to hire a black female retail employee as well as a black man to play Santa Claus. Each Christmas, Scott personally delivered hundreds of gifts to the kids of 40 Acres.

As the second eldest of 10 children who emigrated from Scotland with his family at age three, he was a hard-working immigrant who was befriended by Mr. Walker as a youngster and most likely saw himself in the faces of the Boys Club kids who benefited from his largesse.

Scott was not only an early and ardent supporter of the Boys Club, but a longtime leader. He served as Board President in 1947, 1948, 1951, 1952 and 1959. In 1964, Scott was named President Emeritus. In 1965, he became the third recipient of the Club's Golden Man and Boy Award. Scott said he “considered the award a reminder of his humble beginnings and an inspiration to work harder for the aims of Boys Clubs, rather than a source of personal pride.”

The Committee hand-picked Board members whose names were recognized and respected, including a physician, minister and three bankers. While the Board mulled fundraising possibilities and discussed building plans, the organization’s would-be rival re-surfaced. According to a February 26, 1940 field report, “The committee was receiving some opposition from the YMCA.” Oakes ominously reported, “The YMCA had put on a man full time for the organization of group clubs in different areas of the city.”

“We are classified as do-gooders, but we have to remind ourselves to live above such praise. It is important that we keep our feet on the ground and be reminded that we who are the ‘big shots’ in this town are closer to these boys than we sometimes like to admit.”

— Boys Club Board Member
George A. Scott
Undaunted, the Board determined to move forward with its plans. It hired a prominent architect favored by BCA, H. Lewis Bodmer, proceeded with an intent to incorporate and looked toward active fundraising. BCA proposed that Bodmer create a building with an open air gym similar to an existing Boys Club in Wichita, Texas.

By April 1940, $15,000 had been pledged and the lease of city-owned property adjacent to Memorial Junior High School for a nominal $100 per year was agreed upon. After attending a productive meeting, a BCA representative praised the process: “Fine location. Dandy group.”

Support poured in from around the county and across the country. Professor Ray Hoyer of prestigious University of Notre Dame wrote a letter lauding “BCA’s fine non-sectarian program of work.” The Board explored various financing options, including new federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) funding. BCA quickly shot down this funding source, “pointing out disadvantages of WPA projects.”

In a prescient move, the Club Board affirmed “that the Boys Club of San Diego include in its ultimate plan a program for the entire city; each unit to serve at least 1,000 boys; the city-wide program to include at least three units, namely: Memorial, East San Diego and Pt. Loma.”

**ALL’S QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT**

Although Japan had begun efforts to dominate Asia and the Pacific in 1937, and Germany invaded Poland in 1939, followed by declarations of war on Germany by France and Britain, BCA field notes during this time were oddly silent regarding World War II. Perhaps the battles seemed too far away to impact the U.S., although that would change dramatically on December 7, 1941.

“The Boys Club of San Diego will be open to all; there will be no restriction as regards race or creed. When results begin to show, we’ll wonder why the organization had not been put into effect long ago. I have no hesitation in saying that it will be one of the soundest investments our citizens ever made.”

— Boys Club Board Member Wilbur A. Thomas

**PLANS MOVE FORWARD**
For now, in sunny San Diego, as the spring of 1940 turned to summer, the Board members’ focus was wholeheartedly on the Club. The campaign goal was raised from $40,000-$50,000 to $70,000. BCA, whose board was now chaired by former U.S. President Herbert Hoover, assigned A. Boyd Hines to set up shop in downtown San Diego and assist in the campaign. In a robust show of Club support, philanthropist Arthur Anderson resigned from the YMCA board.

While the architect drew plans for indoor and outdoor areas, the Board determined to kick off its fundraising campaign in February 1941. The BCA representative suggested the February Presidential holiday period as a way to inspire patriotic participation. He wrote, “We have a good opportunity to build a fine Boys Club.”

The sum of $75,000 was ultimately chosen as the fundraising goal. The site was secured. BCA committed in theory to providing 15% assistance from its Building Fund. The amount of money considered to be required was in a state of flux for some time, as the Club Board initially believed that building materials and labor would be able to be achieved at no or low cost.

The year 1940 ended on a high note. Impediments minor and major, including a change of architects and concerns over assignment of responsibilities, would present themselves throughout 1941.
1941 BEGINS IN A FLURRY OF ACTIVITY

AGAINST THE GRAIN
CHAPTER 6

1941 Begins in a Flurry of Activity
BUILDING FUND CAMPAIGN NEAR IN PLANS FOR BOYS’ CLUB

With widespread interest reported in the movement to provide a Boys’ Club of San Diego, leaders of the building fund campaign which will open September 1st at a corner in the U.S. Hotel, have received many queries regarding the proposed club and its use.

Walter A. Talmage, building committee chairman, said the structure is planned for utmost efficiency and economy of operation, based on the experiences of the Boys’ Club of America, with which the local unit is to be affiliated. Primary consideration, he added, is that the building will adequately meet the needs of the hundreds of boys it is designed to serve. To this end it will have its “many trimmings or frills.”

PRACTICAL POINTS STRESSED

“What we want is a practical issue,” one in which every dollar subscribed will be used to the best advantage, and yield the best results for the boys,” Thomas said.

“Each unit of the building will have its particular function, a minimum number of employees will be required, and overhead expenses kept at the lowest possible figure. Once the club is established, boys showing special aptitude will be given various responsibilities which they can then model upon. The experience of other Boys’ clubs is that these opportunities are eagerly seized.”

“Those who are to be boys’ clubs,” Thomas said, “will belong to the boys. Members will present their cards; their guests will be given temporary cards. The group may go to the reading and games rooms, inside each room is another control desk. Another room contains a library and stage. The games room, on occasion, can be used as an auditorium.

GAME ROOM POPULAR

“The games room in Boys’ clubs is a popular place. Every boy wants it must participate in its activities, sitting on the sidelines is discouraged.

“Permission for gym work is given only after a member has been pronounced physically O.K. by a volunteer doctor.

These are club rooms reserved for more mature boys; a dark room

for those interested in photography; a kitchen in which the boys can assist in the preparation of meals on special occasions.”

“When the Boys’ Club of San Diego is established and the results begin to show, we’ll wonder why the idea of such an organization had not been put into effect long ago,” Thomas said. “I have no hesitation in saying that it will be one of the greatest investments our citizens ever made.”

SITE MADE AVAILABLE

Site of the club, adjacent to Memorial Junior High school, has been made available by the city council. While it will almost the majority of its members from the several thousand boys in the Logan Catholic area, any youth between the ages of 7 and 21 is eligible. There will be no restriction as regards race or creed.

The fund campaign will continue until Feb. 26. More than 200 men and women, keenly interested in the welfare of less privileged boys, have volunteered their services. The campaign is being directed by representatives of the Boys’ Clubs of America, who have been assigned no cost to the local group.

INDEDGED BY PASTORS

George A. Scott, civic leader, is general chairman, and William J. Oakes, Memorial school principal, is chairman of the club board of trustees.

Clergymen of all faiths have been requested by the Rev. Shirley B. Rice, ministerial association president, to make announcements concerning the Boys’ Club from their pulpits today.

“The Boys’ club has the support of many San Diegans,” said Mr. Rice, “they believe in what it is doing, and would like to see it succeed. As members of all church faiths they believe in improving the lives of the boys and girls they help, and want to be part of the project.”
While the world was increasingly engaged in deadly warfare, there were mild conflicts, brief skirmishes and courteously-stated misunderstandings between BCA and San Diego. In retrospect, it was a symbiotic relationship that required give and take by both parties.

**CAMPAIGN ATTRACTS CITYWIDE ATTENTION**

In the newspaper parlance of the day, the story of the embryonic Boys Club had “great legs,” meaning it captured the attention of the media, and through them, the populace and potential donors.

On February 1, 1941, the San Diego Union proclaimed: “The movement to make this project an actuality has gained momentum.” Campaign chairman George A. Scott said, “The campaign organization is being rapidly perfected, and will number 200 volunteer workers in the quest for funds.”

Stressing that the new Boys Club would “work and cooperate with all of the social groups in the community,” Scott emphasized that having a place “for boys in areas lacking character-building facilities to gainfully utilize their idle time [will] develop citizenship among youths who because of circumstances are less privileged than others.”

What Scott referred to in polite language was more bluntly called by others “the boy problem.” As one editorial bemoaned, “The boy problem has always been with us … it is the problem of providing suitable activities to absorb the excess energies, mental and physical, that growing boys generate in varying degree. The happy solution of the boy problem is found when excess energies are turned to good account for the benefit and betterment of the boys and the peace and welfare of the communities in which they live.”

The editorial commended the “civic-minded group of our leading business and professional men” in creating a Club whose “announced purposes are to provide recreational and vocational facilities for boys and youths whose economic circumstances do not adequately permit these.” It slyly suggested that men of all economic circumstances might be motivated to support the Boys Club “by recalling our own boyhood days.”

**SPREADING THE WORD**

Club campaign leaders shrewdly continued to broadcast the details of the planned facility far and wide so that people would understand precisely what they were supporting and why.

Clergymen were encouraged to “make announcements concerning the Boys Club from their pulpits.” Board member Reverend Shaw told his colleagues, “The Club has the support of many San Diegans. Their interest is motivated by Christian concepts of an obligation to do something for others. As members of all religious faiths, they welcome the opportunity to work together for such a cause.”
Building Committee Chairman Thomas assured the community that their money would be spent “with the utmost efficiency and economy of operation.... It will have no fancy trimmings or frills ... no formalities.”

Lest people think the facility was intended merely to keep kids off the streets, Thomas promised that the Club “will belong to the boys. Members may go to the reading and games rooms. Another room combines a library and stage. The games room is a popular place. Every boy using it must participate in its activities; sitting on the sidelines is discouraged.” He envisioned that other areas will be “reserved for more mature boys: a dark room for those interested in photography; a department for classes in crafts; a kitchen in which the boys can assist in the preparation of meals on special occasions.”

Thomas emphasized that the Club would be open to all: “There will be no restriction as regards race or creed. When the Boys Club of San Diego is established and the results begin to show, we’ll wonder why the organization had not been put into effect long ago. I have no hesitation in saying that it will be one of the soundest investments our citizens ever made.”

Original Blueprints.
1941 BEGINS IN A FLURRY OF ACTIVITY
CHAPTER 7

Efforts Coalesce
As the fundraising campaign kicked into high gear, behind-the-scenes efforts ramped up. A field report noted, “The long-term lease between the City and Boys Club calls for $100 annually. The property adjoins the Memorial Jr. H.S. in the Logan Heights district, previously referred to as an area of delinquency.”

In May 1941, the Boys Club of San Diego officially incorporated. Principal Oakes headed a seven-member Executive Committee with 23 trustees, including philanthropist Arthur Anderson, who took an active role in many facets of the process. Anderson had suggested that the building be constructed of stucco, which he felt “would hold up better in Southern California weather conditions.” After the U.S. entered World War II, construction materials were limited and ultimately red bricks were used, giving the building a classic beauty and an air of solidity and permanence.

Even at this juncture, although local labor unions agreed to furnish the construction manpower, Oakes warned that “because of the shortage of labor in San Diego, no definite amount could be guaranteed.” That shortage would soon become much more severe and progress would be hampered by a scarcity of steel, cement and other materials. The reason: defense orders took priority over the construction of a modest little club for boys in an unsavory part of town.

Another roadblock occurred when BCA sent a memo “discussing in some detail the San Diego [Boys Club] project, the suggestions made for revision of plans to conform more closely to BCA Standards of Operation and Structure – nine points of criticism and suggestion mentioned.” Possibly one result of these nine points was a change in architects, from H. Lewis Bodmer to a Mr. Lodge.

As time went on, construction estimates varied. In early 1941, the labor input of 3,433 days was said to total – along with material costs – $67,000. It was estimated that “additional amounts of approximately $15,227 in materials will be contributed and an additional amount of labor, approximately amounting to $8,000, making an additional contribution totaling $23,227.” Later figures differed, but for the most part, free or at-cost materials and volunteered labor were sought, along with contributions.

AN AUGUST GROUNDBREAKING

Despite cautionary facts and figures, the Board ebulliently moved forward toward an August 16, 1941 Groundbreaking. BCA suggested the Groundbreaking feature fun and relevant entertainment “in order to attract a larger attendance and secure publicity.” Among the activities would be “a freckle contest and a contest of a boy’s pocket contents.”

The Groundbreaking was grand. Two platforms were installed: one for the many distinguished guests and one for the band. Attendees viewed building plans, newspaper reporters roamed the site, George Scott served as emcee and Mrs. Anderson turned the first shovel of ground. The Andersons had just pledged a whopping $10,000.

Back in 1927, the seed was planted with little notice. But now in 1941, with a booming band in the background, the future Boys Club of San Diego was becoming known to virtually everyone in town.
Youth, Age Join To Break Ground For Boys' Club

Youth and age joined hands yesterday afternoon for a mutual benefit project.

City officials, prominent citizens and several hundred children were present on the site of the Boys' club, on Marcey st., between Twenty-ninth and Thirtieth sts., for ground-breaking and flag-raising ceremonies.

"For children, Boys' club, which is modeled on many similar organizations throughout the United States, will provide healthy recreation; for parents and public-minded citizens, it will curb juvenile delinquency," said George A. Scott, Boys' club vice president, who was master of ceremonies.

FLAG, POLE PRESENTED

After the presentation of a flag pole by V. Wayne Kenaston, secretary, Ironworkers Local 229, and a flag by Mrs. C. E. Wirt, representing the U. S. Grant Ladies circle, G.A.R., Mrs. A. C. Anderson upturned the first shovel of earth on the site.

William J. Oakes, club president, discussed the work of the non-sectarian, non-racial organization and Billy Smith, Memorial Junior High school student, thanked the Boys' club committee on behalf of San Diego children.

OPEN TO BOYS

Councilman Harley E. Knox represented Mayor P. J. Benbough, who was unable to attend. Mrs. Benbough assisted in the flag-raising rites.

"All boys from 7 to 16 years old will have access to the clubhouse," Oakes asserted.

The building, which will cost $50,000, will be 30 by 120 feet, including a large gymnasium. Later, a swimming pool will be added.

Mrs. A. C. Anderson upturned the first shovel of earth on the site of Boys' club, on Marcey st., between Twenty-ninth and Thirtieth sts., yesterday at ground-breaking and flag-raising ceremonies.
CHAPTER 8

Construction Interrupted by Impending War
Boys in Action at S. D. Recreation Site

The Boys' club is getting off to a fine start—boys living in the Memorial Junior High school area are seeing to that themselves. Although construction is not scheduled to start for several weeks, this group of youngsters worked diligently to clear the site for the recreation center.

Building Trades Union Men Give Time on Boys' Club Job

Through generosity of local A.F.L. building trades unions who are donating their services in the interest of San Diego youth, work is progressing on the new Boys' Club of San Diego building at 2500 Marcey ave. Looking over blue prints in the group at right, are left to right: Jim Restine, in charge of plumbers; Chet Van Dusen, Boys' club executive board member; and Golder G. Goss, carpenter foreman; with boys as interested onlookers.
Bricklayers Donate Work on Boys' Clubhouse

Walls of San Diego Boys' clubhouse, Thirtieth st. and Marcey ave., are rising now, with members of the Bricklayers' union joining others from the American Federation of Labor trade unions in donating time and work on their days off, William J. Oakes, club president, announced today. Bricklayers who worked last Saturday on the project included Sam Jemich, C. Smythe, Ed Ponsford, Dale Campbell, J. D. Campbell and Phil Deeds. Their tenders who worked with them were George Richardson, Frank Razo, A. V. Lamb and Ed Anderson.

Carpenters Donate Labor in Building Boys' Club

Donating their labor in the interest of San Diego youth, A.F.L. carpenters are shown here working on the roof on the Boys' club building, under construction at Twenty-ninth st. and Marcey ave. Workers were Harold Dabber, Loy Cody, John Benke, Max Plannes, Owen Walters and Bob Clark, foreman.
Shortly after the Groundbreaking, a building superintendent and contractor were hired. Construction began, mostly with donated material and labor. In one fast-paced month, excavation was completed, forms were laid and the cement was ready for installation. Volunteers were busy at work, with some “300 unemployed carpenters ready to help when necessary.” The Painters Union pledged to donate “all labor needed in decoration of BC building and other various building trades unions, such as the Floorlayers, also offered to help.”

Construction modifications were made “for greater durability and efficiency.” In addition to obtaining the lumber “far below cost,” the bricks were secured at $15/thousand, as compared with the $17/thousand retail cost. As the Boys Club went up, rumor has it that young onlookers cheered when each delivery of red bricks arrived. Future Club kids such as Joe Brown and Gene Richardson carefully helped unload the bricks, making sure not to break a precious one.

Despite Arthur Anderson’s stated preference for stucco, brick was an honorable, albeit humble material. Dating back to 7500 BC, this masonry has been used throughout the centuries and across the globe. It even stars in the “Three Little Pigs” fairy tale, in which the big bad wolf easily huffed and puffed to blow down houses of straw and sticks, but was stymied by the sturdy house of bricks.

The Boys Club bricks remained intact, but the BCA-Club relationship seemed to be in daily danger of breaking. Accommodations were made due to financial concerns: the swimming pool was delayed, and cheaper materials than gypsum and plaster were sought. Construction bids were coming in much higher than anticipated and BCA warned: “Funds nowhere near adequate! No Building Fund money will be forthcoming unless the stipulated conditions are met exactly as specified.”

“I was so excited to watch the Boys Club being built that I helped unload the bricks. A construction guy warned me not to drop any; he said they cost two cents each.”

— Boys Club Alumnus
Gene Richardson
As they suffered through testy meetings, the mettle and optimism of the Club’s organizers prevailed as they pushed forward while enticing positive publicity that they believed would result in successful fundraising now and in the future.

The media followed the building process closely. One newspaper pictured neighborhood kids watching the construction with high anticipation. As the building began to take shape, plans were in the works to select an Executive Director. The search would ultimately take as long as the construction.

**NO POOL AS U.S. PREPARES TO DIVE INTO WAR**

Although Oakes had envisioned a pool, federal aid was not forthcoming and it was recommended “that the San Diego BC forget about the swimming pool for the present because so much of the necessary metal equipment for this is unobtainable because of government priorities.”

Impending war was on everyone’s mind. After a visit to their downtown San Diego home, the BCA representative said the Andersons were “very greatly worried over war and Roosevelt dictatorship. They are moving out to their [Poway] ranch to avoid bombing raids from Japan.”

Conflicts arose in regard to funding timetables, grant applications, documentation, publicity and personnel – not to mention personalities. These clashes would pale in comparison to the December 7, 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor followed by the December 8, 1941 entry of the United States into World War II. The impact upon every American – and on a little facility for boys struggling to be built – was immediate and devastating.

“I was ten years old walking across the 40 Acres on the morning of December 7, 1941. I looked up to see the sky suddenly filled with military airplanes. It was eerie, and scary. I soon learned that this San Diego military response came just moments after the attack in Hawaii.”

— Boys Club Alumnus Edward Fletcher
CHAPTER 9

Coping with Shortages
After what President Franklin Delano Roosevelt called “a day which will live in infamy,” many local laborers in the military town of San Diego who had been donating time to construct the Boys Club hurriedly departed to fight for their country. With manufacturers swamped by the need to quickly fill defense orders, almost everything – steel, cement, lumber, paint – was in short supply. Furnishings were hard to come by. Also contributing to the delay were promised efforts such as the landscaping. It must have been a hectic and frustrating time.

Despite the problems, the project moved forward, albeit slowly. BCA board members presented funding checks totaling nearly $5,000 at an invitation-only dinner on January 20, 1942 at the famed U.S. Grant Hotel in downtown San Diego (an icon since 1910 that still stands today) hosted by the Boys Club Building Committee. In attendance were the San Diego Mayor and City Manager, San Diego City Schools Superintendent, representatives from labor unions and civic organizations, and, in keeping with the times, the Marine Corps Brigadier General and 11th Naval District Rear Admiral.

A 30-piece high school orchestra entertained the crowd and the event was captured in words and pictures by the media. This positive, ongoing publicity enabled William J. Oakes and his team to keep momentum moving forward and donations coming in. The latter was crucial as sources of funding continued to dry up due to war.

In response to financial challenges, Club organizers searched here, there and seemingly everywhere for money to build the Club. By Spring 1942, the building was reported to be “more than 95% completed,” but finances were in dire straits. Arthur Anderson helped shepherd the process of combining several community-based groups into a “War Chest” that included the Community Chest, Red Cross and other “big givers.” Anderson and others hoped this War Chest would designate the Boys Club of as a recipient of major funds.

In the meantime, BCA wavered between suggesting it would make good on its promised third installment of $4,800 and deciding that no, it would not. Some BCA officials posited that providing this third installment “would be a fine gesture and make a fine impression … create a great deal of good will and, perhaps, pay some dividends to us in the end.” Others vociferously disagreed, saying that a meticulous on-site inspection would first be necessary, then saying “the building must be ready for inspection before the deciding official would make the trip,” then stressing that the Club could not have the funds “unless they were financially prepared to operate after the building was erected.”

**Drama Over Dollars**

The Board’s sense of urgency became more dramatic as construction of the facility neared completion, with many pieces still missing or incomplete. Among them was the need for a chain-link fence, required by the City to encircle this facility
embedded in a high-crime, gang-infested area. While impatiently awaiting a possible $10,000 from the War Chest, Finance Committee leaders rode in to the rescue. They aggressively sought $2,500 to pay current expenses; $1,500 was pledged almost immediately with the Andersons promising an additional $500 once the entire $2,500 was raised. Ultimately, Building Committee Chairman Wilbur Thomas and his Board colleagues contributed the entire $2,500 to close all outstanding accounts.

Instead of making the final promised payment of $4,800 in one installment, BCA provided a third installment of $2,400 and later, a fourth installment of the remaining $2,400. As completion of construction drew nigh, the War Chest tentatively approved the $10,000 request, but still, in September 1942, the field notes reported, “The San Diego Board is desperately trying to get the Club in operation before the opening of the War Chest Drive” because the War Chest protocol was to fund existing programs as opposed to those not yet operating.

The Club Board continued to be positive, proactive and results-oriented. Knowing that every dollar counted, they were quick to solicit, accept and publicize donations, whether it was $1,500 from Assemblywoman Jeannette Daley, $1,000 from furniture dealer Mr. Dryer to equip the library, $500 worth of woodworking equipment from Butler Feed Store or $30 from the Race Relations nonprofit to use as needed. City departments and staff contributed in-kind services; the carpentry shop built what would become one of the Club’s most popular features: ping-pong tables.
CHAPTER 10

The Search for a Director
S. D. Boys Club
To Open Soon

The new $3,000 San Diego Boys club building, located at 1351 Market St., will be opened next week by Chester A. Van Deusen, the new director of the Boys Club. Mr. Van Deusen was appointed by the San Diego City Council after the resignation of the previous director. The club has been in operation for many years and has been a member of the city playground commission for over 13 years. He is a resident of San Diego and has been active in the community. The Boys Club will open with a variety of activities, including sports, arts, and crafts, and will provide a safe and fun environment for boys of all ages.
War-related shortages went beyond labor and materials to include the pool of non-
draft-status staff. With the facility only months away from opening its doors to boys
eager to discover the enjoyment and enrichment within, the search for a Director
was haphazard and unsettling.

In March 1942, five names were presented as possible directors. Cognizant of
satisfying the Andersons’ standards of acceptability, BCA recommended a Mr. Collver
“because he does not use either liquor or tobacco, and this would appeal to the
Andersons, who are very religious. Mr. Collver’s present salary is $4,200, he is well-
established in New Haven, Connecticut, where the community gives an excellent
opportunity to educate his children [and] he owns his own home.”

Over the next few months, notations detail the progress – rather, lack of it – in
nailing down the increasingly fickle Mr. Collver. Finally, on September 3, 1942, the
BCA representative wrote, “Late at night received phone call from Mr. Oakes stating
he had received letter from Mr. Collver declining the directorship.” Collver had
cunningly used the San Diego offer to better his salary in New Haven.

A POOR SECOND CHOICE

Valuable time had been lost while Collver vacillated. Desperation was
apparent as BCA recommended a Mr. Rettinger of Philadelphia, who from the
start was judged to be deficient in many ways. But with the difficulties of filling
the post, the Club opening approaching, and scarcity of qualified men whose
circumstances might allow them to avoid the draft, the San Diego team reluctantly
offered Rettinger the position in late September.

Within a few weeks, it was obvious to all that Rettinger was not up to the
task. He refused to “meet the public,” took no initiative and “made a very poor
impression on the people he met.” The San Diego team and BCA had finally found
something they could wholeheartedly agree upon, and Rettinger was fired in early
October.

THIRD TIME’S A CHARM

A happy solution was found almost immediately. Boys Club Trustee Chester
(Chet) Van Dusen had garnered considerable experience in “boys work.” In
addition to serving as the Board’s Executive Secretary, Van Dusen, an insurance
salesman, married with a daughter, sported an extensive background in recreation.
He’d served on the City’s Playground Commission, in leadership roles in softball
and baseball associations and as the Community Chest’s Recreational Council
Chairman.

Beginning in October 1941, Van Dusen had been employed by the Club Board
on a part-time basis “to coordinate labor and secure materials.” Having proven
his worth by first donating his time and then working assiduously, “saving the
organization considerable money and doing a fine piece of work,” Chet Van Dusen
was deemed not only acceptable but exceptional by both BCA and Club Board.

On October 13, 1942, a mere 12 days before the Boys Club of San Diego was scheduled to open for viewing, Van Dusen filled out his application papers. The Board quickly approved him as Director. His annual salary was set at $4,000. The choice would prove to be wise. “Mr. Van,” as he was affectionately called by the boys, was a benevolent father figure and a very good director who related well to members and the public. After navigating with minimal staff when the Club opened, he would later be joined by three full-time and four part-time workers, including the much-beloved Athletic Director Augie Escamilla. Mr. Van served for nearly two decades; he was the first of only five CEOs in the Club’s 75-year history.

Now, in Fall 1942, with “the air of past resentment cleared” between BCA and the San Diego team, the future brightly beckoned. Local papers publicized the Preview Showing. Invitations were sent to a plethora of stakeholders. Programs, decorations, music, flowers and other embellishments were in the works. The building would be spic ‘n’ span, inside and out. And of course, the Club’s reason for being – neighborhood boys – were ready to walk through the doors and have some fun!

“You could see that Club flagpole from everywhere in the 40 Acres. It was like a landmark. We boys would watch to see if the flag was up; that meant the Club was open and we could go there. On Saturdays, we’d bike over and wait for the doors to open. That’s how much we wanted to be there.”

— Boys Club Alumnus John Leroy Taylor
AT LONG LAST, THE TRADITION OF CHANGING LIVES BEGINS

AGAINST THE GRAIN
CHAPTER 11

At Long Last, the Tradition of Changing Lives Begins
The San Diego Boys' club, 2930 Marcey ave., will have a preview dedication this evening. Honored will be those who gave time and materials to ward construction of a community project that is expected to be an important factor in juvenile life here.

* * *

Club Builders Will Be Honored

A brick and concrete monument to better boyhood will be given a preview dedication late today when the San Diego Boys' club at 2930 Marcey ave. will be the scene of ceremonies starting at 6 p.m.

Club directors will honor members of building trades unions who donated time and firms that donated materials for construction of the community project.

The program will be opened with selections by Bonham Brothers Boys' band. William J. Oakes, club president, will introduce Councilman Harley Knox. The councilman is to express appreciation on behalf of boys of all ages to K. G. Bitter, secretary of the San Diego Building & Construction Trades council, who is to respond on behalf of building tradesmen.

Bitter will introduce Gov. Culbert L. Olson, who is to dedicate the building at 6:30, and Rep. Ed V. Izac. After a talk by the governor the building's facilities will be inspected.

Constructed with the advice of the building department of the Boys' Clubs of America, the structure is said to be one of the best of its type in southern California. It has an auditorium, game room, stage, library, kitchen, clinic, senior game room, woodworking shop, graphic art, electric and art metal shop, lobby, and control office. There also is an outdoor athletic field.
On October 25, 1942, approximately 15 years to the date after initial correspondence began, after a two-year fundraising campaign, much jumping over hurdles, a construction cost of $80,000, plus over $20,000 of in-kind labor and materials, the Preview Showing was held. This humble Club would endure to become the oldest Boys & Girls Club building in continuous use in Southern California.

The Preview Showing was, in style and substance, akin to a Grand Opening. It was a community celebration, showcasing the way in which an array of individuals and organizations joined together to begin changing lives of Logan Heights’ boys. The event's primary intent was for the Club “to honor and express their appreciation to members of the different crafts in the Building Trades who contributed their time in the construction of the building.”

**SHAPING CHARACTERS AND CAREERS**

The daylong festivities were an especially bright light in a dark time when San Diegans were losing men in the war. During the afternoon, members of the trades, the Board, BCA executives, Club supporters and the public toured the building.

Each visitor was given a leaflet that read: “The Board of Trustees is happy to welcome you to the new San Diego Boys Club, which we dedicate with grateful appreciation to the thousands of men and women whose generosity will enable us to help shape the character and the careers of so many San Diego boys. W.J. Oakes, President”

At 5 pm, the Bonham Brothers’ Boys Band gave a concert in the new auditorium. At 6 pm, Oakes welcomed the crowd, after which “a boy, representing the youth of the community, expressed his appreciation on behalf of the boys.”

“We welcome you to the new San Diego Boys Club, which we dedicate with grateful appreciation to the thousands of men and women whose generosity will enable us to help shape the character and the careers of so many San Diego boys.”

— Boys Club Founder
William J. Oakes
AT LONG LAST, THE TRADITION OF CHANGING LIVES BEGINS AGAINST THE GRAIN

From *The Bonham Brothers’ Boys Band* by William Ward Martin.
Two stellar guests made the occasion memorable and moving. As the band played a lively rendition of “California, Here I Come,” Governor Culbert Olson was escorted to the podium. He spoke passionately about the importance of the Boys Club, saying, “Occasions like this give me more satisfaction than most activities.” He complimented the community “for supporting and building a Boys Club during these difficult times.”

The other guest was Congressman Edouard Izac, a decorated Navy Lieutenant. He praised the Boys Club, saying the program “makes youths better soldiers, and better citizens after the war. We are so busy thinking of the consequences of war – of the loss of blood, limb and life – that we don’t think of keeping up the normal tempo of our lives.” He called the Club “something to boost the morale of the nation.”

From this day forth, what would become known as the William J. Oakes Boys & Girls Club would boost the morale of the neighborhood and its residents. As Principal Oakes had worked unstintingly to achieve, the Club was ready to embark on shaping characters and careers; changing lives.
Part Two: Growing Strong 1943-1953
CHAPTER 12
Doors of Opportunity Open
Special Ceremonies Will Mark Opening of $80,000 S.D. Structure

Open house and inspection of the new $80,000 home of the Boys' club of San Diego, at 2530 Marcy Ave., will be held this afternoon from 2 to 4 when the single-storied brick structure will be dedicated officially, George Scott, program chairman, announced.

DEDICATION SCHEDULED TODAY FOR NEW BOYS' CLUBHOUSE

In a two-hour ceremony, the new $80,000 home of the Boys' club of San Diego at 2530 Marcy Ave., will be dedicated this afternoon from 4 to 6, it was announced by George A. Scott, general program chairman and second vice president of the organization.

"Everything is ready for the dedication of this handsome clubhouse, which represents a real community investment," Scott said. "By that I mean that several thousand persons contributed either money, services or materials for this building. Many gave in our company, still hundreds of others contributed their skilled services, and others gave materials at cost. We hope to pay tribute to the public spirit of these people at our dedication. The public is invited."

Scott said the club serves more than 500 youngsters of all nationalities, with many youth-building activities including many projects which are contributing to the war effort. These include a division of "scrap soldiers," existing in collecting much-needed scrap metals, and a group which is building stretchers for the medical division of the civilian defense council.

Open house and inspection of the single-story brick building will be held from 4 until 6, with officers and members of the trustees and their wives serving on the reception committee. Music will be by Benjamin Boys' band. Members of the Boys' club will be guides for the visitors, Scott said.

The main program will be in the auditorium from 5 to 6, with Scott as master of ceremonies. William J.

W. J. Oakes, president of the Boys' club, will introduce the main speaker, David W. Armstrong, of New York City, executive of the Boys' Club of America, to which the local organization is affiliated. The invocation will be by the Rev. Charles H. Hampton, and the Rev. John C. Wiley will give the benediction.

Fred Temple, 15, charter member of the Boys' club, will accept the new clubhouse on behalf of the 975 members of the organization. He will be presented by Chester Van Duyn, the club's executive secretary.

Other guests will include Walter Hal, of New York City, director, program and personnel, Boys' Club of America, and A. H. Fahrenholz, of Santa Monica, area director of the Pacific coast for the Boys' Clubs of America. The national office recently attended a wartime conference in Los Angeles, and arrived here yesterday.
After the Preview Showing, things moved quickly. On November 1, 1942, the Club doors opened and boys poured in. Basking in the goodwill and high expectations of all parties involved, Chester Van Dusen took the reins as Executive Director.

The Boys Club of San Diego received its coveted Boys Club of America charter on December 22, 1942. As of January 6, 1943, the Club already boasted a membership of more than 400 youth, with an average daily attendance of 161. The facility was obviously filling a much-needed niche.

The Club was open from 2:00-9:30, Monday through Friday, and also on Saturdays. One full year’s membership was 25¢ for boys 7-9; 50¢, 9-11; 75¢, 13 and 14; $1 for 15-18. ($1 in 1942 equates to $15.25 today.) The accelerated rates correlated to additional activities available to the older kids.

Although boys of diverse ethnicities got along at the Club, squabbles continued between the Club and BCA: over money, equipment and the behavior of some members (whose popping of balloons in the auditorium irked one BCA visitor).

Apparently, the frustration was palpable. A BCA field report stated, “Amazed at their attitude toward us. Never encountered group so impossible to reason with.”

Due to its displeasure with Club management, BCA threatened now, as it had in the past, to withhold the remainder of its promised Building Fund 15%. As he had before, philanthropist Arthur Anderson served as a tactful diplomat who negotiated a détente between East and West in time to carry out the May 23, 1943 Dedication.

Ultimately, BCA “wrote a message of goodwill and amity, intended to cement the friendly relations between San Diego BC and BCA.” After this, disagreements diminished and eventually faded away.

“Many of us could have gone down the wrong path. There were a lot of temptations out on the street: gang kids; guys making bad decisions. Why didn’t we go down that path? Our parents, and the Club staff. In other words, people who cared about us.”

— Oakes Alumni Association Members
Today the keeper of history for the William J. Oakes Boy & Girls Club Alumni Association, in 1945 Fred Ayap was 11 years old and in the fifth grade at Logan Elementary when his friend, Paul (Ginga) Malabana, invited him to join the Boys Club. Ayap says he absorbed a lot about the world living on Ocean View Boulevard and making friends at the Club with boys whose backgrounds differed from his Filipino culture. He learned how to travel via public transportation and how to navigate through life, starting his 40-year career at the City of San Diego in an entry-level job and ending as Equipment Operator.

I have many great memories of the Boys Club. When I joined, the sports program consisted of different divisions based on age and height. As a younger member, I was assigned to the lowest division: E.

Basketball was the first sport I participated in. I played forward. In the beginning, I did not get much game play time, but just being part of the team was fun. We would ride Street Car #11 downtown, then transfer to a bus that took us to what is known today as Little Italy to play Washington School.

My first big “away” game was in Pasadena. We had to be at the Club at 4 am. I was so excited that I told my mom to wake me up at 3 am, so I wouldn't miss out. I was the first person to arrive and get on the bus. Our sleeping arrangements for the tournament required us to carry our mattresses up two flights of stairs to the basketball court, where we slept.
I’ll never forget these events and I’ll always remember Athletic Director Augie Escamilla. He not only was a great coach, but a great leader and mentor. He never cursed or yelled. He would just look you in the eye and say, “This is how it’s gonna be.” We all respected and loved him.

Augie paid special attention to each person’s individual needs. He possessed patience in teaching us and encouraged all of us to have confidence in ourselves. I learned at an early age from him how to be a good sportsman in winning and losing. I have taken that knowledge and applied it throughout my life.

Augie always set a good example. He got things done. He cleared the land around the 40 Acres to make a track for us to run on. Just think of all the great athletes who got their start on that track Augie built! Later, in the early 2000s, when the Alumni Association members started fixing up our old Club, Augie was right there pitching in.

The Boys Club gave an opportunity to us boys from low-income families to participate in sports; something they would otherwise not be able to enjoy. It gave us a feeling of being together and part of something special; something that made our lives better. I have never forgotten what a profound experience it made in my life.

I never left the Boys Club. The Boys Club never left me.
CHAPTER 13

In the News
INDUSTRIAL THREATS—Making their debut in loop play, these boys are representing the Boys' club in the current industrial basketball league. Left to right, they're (back row) John Bci, Larry Burk, Lucky Lujan, Otto Geant and Dino Amerigo; (kneeling) Kenny Branch, Manual Pachecho and Tommy Branch.
Workshop of New Boys' Club

Several of the boys helping in the Junior Red Cross projects for the summer recreation program are Gilbert Garcia, Abelardo Rodriguez, and Tommy Burton, making lap boards and reading boards for use in military hospitals.

S. D. Boys' Club Builds Emergency Shelters

Exuberance of youth is being turned to war effort in the workshop of San Diego Boys' club. For making the playgrounds, these lads are building stretchers for disaster emergency. Director Van Busen assists.
“My older brothers fibbed about my age to Receptionist Mabel Waring to get me in the Boys Club almost two years before I turned seven. My Club membership was the greatest investment I ever made growing up in Logan Heights.” — Boys Club Alumnus Art Powell

World War II raged on, dominating the headlines. On January 28, 1943, former President Herbert Hoover, now BCA Chair, gave a stirring speech. He said, “We hear a lot of talk about various fronts – popular fronts, Democratic fronts, Republican fronts, Communist fronts, all sorts of fronts. I often wonder whether we don't need a new front which has no ideological background, but which might be called the front of decency.”

Hoover asserted that this decency front existed at Boys Clubs and estimated that half a million former members served in the military. He believed, “The very nature of their association with their club makes individualists of the boys ... the clubs are excellent training grounds for democracy.”

The fledgling Boys Club of San Diego was making headlines of its own. Positive press helped garner additional community support, and motivated boys to join and participate. The local papers were full of the basketball exploits of members, who played on teams with colorful names like “Wharf Rats” and proudly donned their Boys Club jerseys as they made their debut in citywide loop play.

STRETCHING TO FILL A WARTIME NEED

In these war years, Club activities went beyond fun and games. Members and staff joined in the defense effort. Kids scoured their neighborhood for scrap metal, amassing treasures such as boilers and bed springs. They helped guide trucks to a sorting center and were recipients of proceeds from scrap sales. These collections would continue for years after the war ended, providing an ongoing revenue stream.

The boys worked tirelessly in the workshop to build disaster emergency stretchers. According to newspaper accounts, “Work on the stretchers starts at 4 pm each weekday. Formerly the
youngsters crowded the basketball court or practiced on the club’s commando track, but now they rush to the workshop and elbow one another to get at saws, planes and hammers.” Aided by their fathers, who joined in after putting in a long day at work, the boys produced 10 stretchers a week for the defense council. In addition to learning how to handle tools and build much-needed items, the boys delighted in being able to sign their stretcher. They also made lap boards and reading boards for use in military hospitals.

Herbert Hoover was right: the Boys Club was an excellent training ground for American democracy and its members were in the vanguard of the decency front!
“Some folks didn’t expect any of us to succeed. We certainly proved them wrong.

We rose above our meager surroundings and accomplished great things.”

— Boys Club Alumnus Luis Orrantia

Born in 1936 in the tiny mining and smelting town of Clarkdale, Arizona, Luis Orrantia and his family moved to San Diego in 1942. Young Luis was at first awed and a bit afraid of everything in the “big city.” But thanks to friends he made in school and at the Boys Club, he settled in well. With his parents as role models and his own strong drive, Orrantia matriculated at San Diego State University and became an architect. After operating his own business for several years, he served in executive positions for well-known construction firms in San Diego and Reno, Nevada.


Clarkdale was miniscule. I knew burros and cows, but not cabs. People-wise, it was just Anglos and Mexican-American families, like mine, so when I first encountered black people in San Diego, that scared me too. Until I met the boy who became my “black brother”: Floyd Robinson.

We lived on 26th and Logan. Every day, a kid at Logan Elementary who knew I was timid demanded that I hand over the quarter my mother gave me for lunch money. I went without lunch for a month until Floyd found out about it. He made the bully stop stealing my money. Floyd and I became close friends after that. David Woods and I also were friends; we still are! I have warm feelings for so many of the guys with whom I attended school and the Club.

By the time we got to Memorial Junior High, we all played sports (my specialty was baseball – I have one ankle and two knee replacements to show for it) and we all went to the Boys Club.
I participated in just about everything. Played pool. Made things in woodshop. Enjoyed the gym and swimming pool once they were built.

We knew that some teachers and other folks didn’t expect any of us to succeed at much of anything. We certainly proved them wrong. We didn’t just do well; we succeeded far beyond everyone’s expectations of us.

We accomplished great things. Why? Because we had to. We had to rise above our meager surroundings. And we did.
CHAPTER 14

An Official Dedication and a Gym-Dandy New Campaign
Now that the Club had enjoyed its Preview Showing in October 1942 followed by opening to members the following month, Club leaders wanted to show off the eminently successful facility to the public. An afternoon Dedication was held on May 23, 1943. One of the celebrated guests was BCA National Director David W. Armstrong, a highly respected top official with the organization from 1940-1956. Armstrong had been heavily involved with the establishment of the San Diego Club throughout its gestation; in fact, the May 23rd Dedication date was chosen in large part so that he could attend.

Before the event, Board member George A. Scott told reporters, “Everything is ready for the dedication of this handsome clubhouse, which represents a real community investment. Several thousand persons contributed either money, services or material for this building. We hope to pay tribute to the public spirit of these people. The club serves more than 500 youngsters of all nationalities, with many youth-building activities.”

Despite the somber backdrop of war, the Dedication was celebratory. Young members served as guides for the visitors, who oohed and aahed at the facility. As at previous events, the Bonham Brothers’ Boys Band energized the crowd. Amid the speeches and presentations by officials was a poignant moment when charter member Fred Temple, 15, accepted the Boys Club of San Diego clubhouse on behalf of his 575 fellow members.

As the festive day came to an end, William J. Oakes was already focused on raising money to build a gym and pool. He hoped to obtain funding from the Andersons and the federal government.

Even during wartime, it was thought, “because of the Government’s concern on juvenile delinquency, it might even be possible

“Our Boys Club is the most ‘inclusive’ club in the world, for no boy is ever turned away from the Club, regardless of the color of his skin, his religious beliefs, or even his past record in the community.”

— Boys Club Board Member
Irving E. Friedman
Boys, Boys, Boys!

AN OFFICIAL DEDICATION AND A GYM-DANDY NEW CAMPAIGN
They Aspire to Aid City's Youth

Leaders in the Boys' club campaign for a $40,000 gymnasium fund through popular subscription are (left to right), Mayor Harley Knox, William J. Oakes, president; James Robbins, campaign chairman, and A. Earl Gustafson, vice president. Knox and Robbins are directors of the unit.
to secure priorities on material.” After meeting with San Diego Mayor Harley Knox, the San Diego team and BCA leadership decided to begin a “quiet campaign” to raise sufficient funds for what Oakes had envisioned from the start: a full-featured Club.

**FUNDRAISING EFFORT MAKES SOME NOISE**

By early 1944, the campaign was no longer silent. Newspapers, foremost among them publications owned by Club supporter James Copley, reported a growing swell of immense support from the business community. The campaign went public on the morning of June 12, 1944, gaining immediate coverage by Copley’s San Diego Tribune, which ran a story that afternoon. It read: “With a $40,000 fund sought from public subscriptions as the objective, a campaign to build and equip a gymnasium for the Boys Club of San Diego was announced.”

Explaining that the war had prevented any expansion since 1942, Oakes reported, “The Club has been an important influence in the lives of hundreds of youngsters, providing them with recreational, instructional and social facilities. The Club’s work is limited only by the facilities we can make available for these youngsters, and the gymnasium has top priority. It is a work that merits the financial and moral support of the community.”

Throughout the coming months, the media continued to promote the fundraising campaign. One article called it an “enterprise that is deserving of financial support by all citizens.” It praised the Club for “doing a fine job in the training and self-disciplining of youth. Through manual training and athletics, it is developing self-reliance and the capacity for team work, which is essential to good citizenship.”

The sports sections cast a bright light on athletic endeavors of Club members in track and field, basketball, baseball, football and wrestling. Boys Club teams frequently won local and regional competitions. Often in the news were the Boys Club Aces, which clinched several victories in the Club’s early days, including the American Legion Basketball Championship. Also decorating the sports pages were individual athletes such as sprinter Glenn Willis, who set records in the mid-1940s at the Pasadena Invitational Track Games. By featuring successful Club athletes, the newspapers generated an upbeat attitude toward the Club and its members.

Thanks to continuing publicity, active participation by influential civic leaders and what genuinely was a feel-good story in a close-knit military town battered by the effects of war, the fund-raising campaign would be successful. The gym would open in 1950; the pool in 1951. Both facilities would be welcomed by the kids with boundless enthusiasm.

During this era, swimming nude was typical for all-male organizations. Many boys couldn’t afford real swim suits; their cut-offs would shed material, which clogged the pool’s filtration system. Some Club members would later recall that their initial impetus for joining the Boys Club was having the opportunity to learn to swim, with or without proper attire.
San Diego Boys Club members compete at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena in the mid-1940s.
AFTER JUST ONE YEAR, LIVES ARE ALREADY BEING CHANGED

In November 1943, as it approached the end of its first year of operation, the Club produced an inaugural annual report that showed: “Even with the distractions of a war-torn world, the facility is still flourishing. In its first 11 months, there was a total of 44,826 attendance in activities ranging from woodworking (power machinery is endlessly fascinating for the small boy) to athletics to game room to special activity groups such as the zoo.”

The report declared, “Considering that the club’s roster lists 652 boys, such an activity attendance is considered remarkable.” It certainly proved that the members did not simply walk in the door and sit around on the sidelines. They got involved and got along. They learned. They gained skills. They created. They contributed. They were good young American citizens.
David Woods has amassed an impressive list of educational degrees and career accomplishments. Upon graduating from San Diego High School in 1954, he earned a degree in accounting, became a CPA, graduated from law school and enjoyed a long (1962-1998) career with the State of California, rising to serve as Deputy State Controller.

Woods credits the Boys Club for opening his young life to places beyond Logan Heights, including the famed Rose Bowl in Pasadena, where he participated in annual Southern California Boys Club Track Meets. Most of all, this Oakes Alumni Association member credits the Club for opening his eyes and heart to a wider world.

I lived at 30th and Ocean View Boulevard (432 So. 30th) before Sawaya’s Market was built. My house was across the street from what is now the market. After the market was built, Sawaya’s bought our house along with three others and converted the four lots into a parking lot. I grew up, therefore, across the 40 Acres from the Boys Club. I walked across the 40 Acres to attend Logan Elementary School, Memorial Junior High School, and the Boys Club.

Walking the 40 Acres was significant because it was a route you always travelled to and from the Boys Club with friends. For example, I was a neighbor of the Powell Brothers (Charles, Ellsworth and Arthur), and I remember walking across the acreage with them at night after the Friday night movies at the Club. I was young and only a year older than Arthur, but I always felt safe walking with the two older brothers.

My earliest memory is playing on the baseball team for 10-12 year olds in 1947-48. I also played touch football, basketball and ran track. Our track team was so successful that we would win lots of ribbons. As we won ribbons in our events, we would pin them on our coach, Augie Escamilla, to hold for us. After a little while, Augie would be completely covered with ribbons. On our way back from tournaments in Pasadena, and the Southern California Boys Club Track Meets (originally held at the Rose Bowl but later at the Los Angeles Coliseum), we would stop at the Long Beach Pike Amusement Park for a couple of hours, and arrive home around midnight. I can't emphasize enough how much fun this was!

Augie Escamilla was not only our coach, but a valued friend and mentor. I'm confident that at least eight out of ten players would claim him as a surrogate father. Another important contribution was the age integration inherent in some programs. The presence of role models was strong and caused the younger kids to learn from the older kids.
Besides athletics, I participated in the craft shop, game room, watched serial movies like “Flash Gordon” and took day trips to the beach and other destinations. I especially recall a bicycle trip to Coronado supervised by our Director Chet Van Dusen, whom we called Mr. Van. Although a busy administrator, he would make time to take us on special outings.

As I look back on my years with the Club, I believe that the most valuable experience I received was from my association with diverse ethnic groups. We were all together – whites, blacks, Latinos, Filipinos, Asians – all playing and learning together. The friends I made and the appreciation I have for that positive multicultural experience remains with me today.
CHAPTER 15

Augie Escamilla and His Kids
AUGIE ESCAMILLA  
FEBRUARY 12, 1923 – MAY 1, 2013

As profiled in George Semper’s 40 Acres of Memories, Augustine (Augie) Escamilla was the eldest of ten children born in a small town outside Guadalajara, Mexico. His father worked for the railroad, and the family moved to Piru, California in Ventura County.

As a student at Fillmore High School in nearby Fillmore, California, Escamilla was an outstanding athlete, particularly in track and field, where he specialized in distance running. Upon graduation, with the assistance of two Fillmore High teachers who interceded on his behalf, he received a scholarship from San Diego State College, where he excelled as an outstanding student and distance runner.

Semper said, “Augie excelled even more as a coach and teacher to many of us at the Boys Club.” He worked at the Club from 1943-1950 while earning a B.A. in Physical Education, followed by a Master’s in Counseling. He served as a teacher, coach and counselor at Memorial Junior High School for seven years. Escamilla spent the next ten years as a counselor in the Health Education Department for San Diego City Schools, followed by 21 years as a counselor at his alma mater, San Diego State College. With an unabated love of helping youth and of running, the man his mentorees call “a coach among coaches” served as a track and field official while winning masters events in his later years. He won numerous running competitions in his age bracket and in 1996 was awarded honorary life membership in the San Diego High School Alumni Association.

To the Boys Club members who grew up under his tutelage, Escamilla’s running accomplishments are laudatory, but cannot compare to the importance he played in their young lives. After catching the winning pass in the American Football League All-Star game in the early 1960s, Oakland Raiders wide receiver Art Powell credited Escamilla as "the driving force behind all us boys in Logan Heights … when we first started hanging around the Boys Club. I’ll always remember him."
To expand the Club’s athletic offerings, in 1943 Director Van Dusen publicized openings to San Diego State College (now San Diego State University) students, saying he would consider any student “provided he is truly interested in working with boys and can show that he is capable of working with youngsters.”

This solicitation paid off in a transformational way when college student Augie Escamilla learned of the opportunity and applied for the job of Physical (Athletic) Director. Through this remarkable man’s dedication, energy, empathy and love for “his kids,” a great many Club members achieved success in diverse fields. An entire tribute case at the Club is now dedicated to him.

Who knows where Augie Escamilla was when he saw the job opening? Perhaps this ambitious learner and standout track star was dashing from one class to another, racing to the library to study, or on his way to run a few laps. Wherever he was and whatever he was doing, it was a fortuitous moment. The position propelled him to a lifelong career in which he inspired thousands of youth to achieve their personal best, in sports and in life.
As a ten-year-old child from a broken home who'd lived in many places and unsuccessfully attended several schools, A.C. Mills was by his own accounts “a troubled kid” in 1946. Already in his young life, he acted out, then decided he “didn’t want to be bad anymore,” only to turn his anxiety inward and suffer skin eruptions that itched mercilessly and left lasting scars. A doctor at the only hospital in San Diego that served African-Americans gave him tranquilizer injections. But A.C. needed stronger – more spiritual, more life-affirming – medicine, which he fortuitously found one day at 2930 Marcy Avenue.

Augie Escamilla saved my life. Above all, he taught me, “Don’t let people’s perception of you be your realization.” I have followed that philosophy my entire life.

I was born in Brawley, a segregated town near El Centro where white people lived on one side and people of color – mostly African-Americans and Mexican-Americans but also people from China and India – lived much more poorly on the other side. The only work my parents could get in Brawley was domestic, so in search of better opportunities, we moved to the San Diego area. My mother got a good-paying job as an electrical assembler helping to build B2 airplanes at Convair.

My father could not find decent work, so he left. Ultimately, they got divorced and she re-married and had seven more children. At first, my father was in and out of my life, but when I was nine, he absconded and I didn’t see him again until I was 20.

My step-father paid little attention to me. My mother was very busy at Convair, where it seemed she always had to work late. In second grade, I started fighting and being mean to kids. My mom sent me to a couple different schools hoping I’d improve, but when I marked up a desk with a knife, she sent me to Brawley to live with my grandparents, who were busy raising their own family so again, I didn’t get much attention. Finally, an auntie suggested I attend a Seventh Day Adventist school back in San Diego, where I did behave but kept my problems inside myself. I became very withdrawn.

When I was ten and on the verge of a nervous breakdown, I happened to walk by the Boys Club. A guy came up to me and said in a friendly voice, “Hi son! How’re you doing?” It was Athletic Director Augie Escamilla. He was forming a softball team. I was disappointed to learn all the spots were taken, but he told me not to give up, so I didn’t. Since there were so many kids wanting to play, he created another team and I was on it!

To play, I needed a glove. My mother couldn’t afford the gloves in most of the sports shops. Finally we found a cheap, first-base glove. So Augie made me first baseman.
Every day after school, I couldn’t wait to get to the Club and see Augie. He was five-foot-two, but a giant of a man. He’d always say, in a pleasant voice, “Hi, boys!” and everyone’s heart would go a little higher. I saw him as a father figure; a special gift to me from God. He taught me values; that was the start of my healing process. He taught me respect for other people, to be humble, to be honest and that I could be anything I wanted to be.

I took his advice to heart and became a productive adult. After turning down a football scholarship at Arizona State because I had a job and was helping to support my mother, I served four honorable years in the U.S. Air Force. Then I worked for Rohr Industries for 31 years, including 20 in the Purchasing Department as a Contracts Administrator. I was Administrator for the Solid Rocket Fuel Boosters for the Space Shuttle and Titan Missiles programs.

When I look back, I realize that as a youngster, there were times I could have gone down the wrong path, but I didn’t let the guys in gangs influence me because I didn’t want to disappoint Augie or my mom.

Logan Heights was a melting pot. What united us is that we all were considered marginalized. “Uneducable throw-aways. Boys who won’t amount to anything.” That’s the way many teachers viewed and treated us.

In the outside world, African-Americans such as I faced prejudice (like jobs that were posted but mysteriously “filled” when I asked for an application). Inside the Club, we had sports, movie nights, crazy things like four-man blindfolded boxing matches, and pickup basketball games. Most of all, inside the Club were people who cared. Memorial Principal Oakes would come by after school to see us enjoying ourselves.

When we were in the Club, all the issues we faced outside were gone. The Club became our incubator. We grew.

One of my favorite quotes is, “It’s better to mold a boy than mend a man.” That’s exactly what the Club did for thousands of kids.

Life throws so many monkey wrenches at you. You have to keep trying to do things the right way, no matter what. That’s what Augie taught me and I still live by that today.

Augie developed Alzheimer’s. He died in 2013. At the end, he did not remember much about anyone or anything. I visited him in the facility where he spent his last weeks. As soon as I walked in the door, Augie looked up and said, “Hi, A.C.!”

His recognition of me made me feel uplifted. Just like the very first day I walked into the Club.
CHAPTER 16

War Ends;
New Club Era Begins
WARTIME ENDS; NEW CLUB ERA BEGINS

AGAINST THE GRAIN

BOYS OF TODAY — MEN OF TOMORROW

Future Looks Bright for Him

ALMENDO RODRIGUEZ

Those who have seen Armando perform for the San Diego Bears' club in the city-wide touch football player predict a bright future for him. His rhythmic grace in tackling and blocking and his ability to pick off passes with professional accuracy promise that his future will be a shining one in football.
In Fall 1945, World War II finally came to an end. However, with the Civil Rights Act of 1965 two decades away, virulent racism was still prevalent throughout the U.S. Even when thousands of black soldiers – including the celebrated Tuskegee Airmen – had departed to fight for their country, units were segregated. Veterans of color returning to America found to their dismay that the nation for which they had risked their lives did not welcome them home as full citizens.

Amid this bleak reality, one beacon of light where integration reigned and equality of opportunity flourished was the Boys Club of San Diego, which more than 1,150 members now called home. When the Club celebrated its third anniversary on November 20, 1945, the event was showcased in every paper in town.

The Tribune-Sun glowingly wrote, “Few institutions are born, grow up and become of age within three years, but that [is] the record of the San Diego Boys Club. This organization has assumed responsibility so splendidly. One of this club’s claims for distinction is that it recognizes no racial distinctions … it promotes racial democracy.”

The photos of Club members in newspaper clippings tell the story. In one friendly game of rotation pool, wielding pool cues are Coyle Jeffries, 10 (black), who lived at 3438 Newton Avenue, and Jimmy Willis, 9 (white), who lived at 3074 Newton Avenue. These and other kids went to school together and played together at the Club. Also pictured are four 15-year-old touch football players. Two are black; one is Hispanic; one is white. All “wear their club sweaters with pride.”

**AN IMPORTANT CIVIC MILESTONE**

The third anniversary was heralded as “marking an important civic milestone.” With fees still just $1 per year, if a youngster’s family was unable to pay the membership all at once, a penny a week would suffice.

“This year, 1945, for the first time, Logan Heights did not lead the City of San Diego in juvenile delinquency. There is no doubt in my mind at all that the Boys Club was responsible for the reduction in delinquency.”

— San Diego Police Chief Clifford E. Peterson
“If a couple of us kids would get into an argument at the Club, the staff would give us boxing gloves, put us in the ring and tell us to come out fighting. One time I was boxing an older kid. It got rough. He beat me up pretty good. I lost the fight. Under the floor that’s there now lie my blood, sweat and tears!”

— Boys Club Alumnus Floyd Robinson

Adding value to the community was the Club’s role in reducing juvenile delinquency. Police Chief Clifford E. Peterson said, “For the first time, Logan Heights did not lead the city in juvenile delinquency. There is no doubt in my mind at all that the Boys Club was responsible for the reduction.”

According to Club Director “Mr. Van,” the boys learned to police themselves. He explained, “When a couple of Clubbers develop a grudge against each other, they bang it out with boxing gloves.”

Club members elected a Boys Council to handle problems. If rules were transgressed, the Council meted out appropriate punishments such as a week’s suspension. Having a say in their Club’s operations taught the boys about democracy on a grass-roots level. With this grounding, it is no surprise that many Club alumni were on the forefront of social justice matters as adults.

PLAYING TOGETHER IN HARMONY

At this juncture, Director Van Dusen had something new on his wish list: harmonicas. San Diego once boasted a boys’ harmonica band, but the war’s manufacturing restrictions caused its demise.

Van Dusen pleaded, “There hasn’t been a single, old-fashioned harmonica in the city for many months now, and we are hoping that San Diegans who happen to own any and have no use for them will donate them to the club so we can get started. The boys will be glad to get them. Some are talented and all of them are musically-inclined.”

The Community Chest ran the harmonica campaign. Key businesses jumped on the bandwagon. Declaring, “Playing in harmony applies to more than music,” a Union Title Insurance and Trust Company ad exhorted citizens to support “healthy, clean, constructively occupied lads” by offering their support.
LEARNING TO LIVE IN HARMONY

THIS BOYS' CLUB harmonica band knows that playing in harmony applies to more than music. Juvenile delinquency is generally only misguided recreation—but no Boys' Club member has to repeat the recent statement of a youthful car-stealer that he "had nothing else to do and no place to go." BOYS FROM 8 to 18 BENEFIT through your Community Chest contribution, which provides them with a club where they can find plenty else to do. When juvenile delinquency goes down and the number of healthy, clean, constructively occupied lads in the community goes up, EVERYBODY BENEFITS. Give to the Boys' Club through your Community Chest. This saves another campaign.

This message presented as a public service by San Diego's oldest and largest title insurance company.

Union Title Insurance and Trust Company

SECOND AVENUE
AT BROADWAY
SAN DIEGO 12,
CALIFORNIA

TEL E P H O N E  M A I N 8121

WAR ENDS; NEW CLUB ERA BEGINS
Brothers Leroy John Taylor, born in 1934, and Sammy Taylor, born in 1939, are devoted to the Oakes Boys Club they say “molded us into the men we became. We’re not talkers; we’re doers.”

Growing up without financial advantages but with the invaluable benefit of caring parents who set them on the right path and made sure they did not stray, they became hard-working, successful adults who have given back to their community.

John credits the Club’s Athletic Director Joe Jacobs for inspiring him to play sports and remain in school, after which he pursued a 37-year career as Heavy Equipment Operator for the City of San Diego’s Water Department. “Coach Taylor” also served for many years as a volunteer football and baseball coach. Sammy parlayed the skills he learned in the Club’s shop into a business career as the owner of TNT Mobile Welding. A staunch patriot who served in the military and bought the historically appropriate, 48-star American flag for the Oakes flagpole he repaired, Sammy spent 2009-2015 providing force protection for U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

When asked why they do what they do for their Club and their community, the Taylor brothers quote their Club mentor, Augie Escamilla: “I’m just doing what I love to do.”

**SAMMY** Here is why I don’t play pool. Upstairs at the Club, where the teen room is now, was a game room. All us kids wanted to go up there, but you had to be at least 16 years old. John was old enough, but I wasn’t. One day, I snuck up there. My brother was shooting pool. I got behind him so I could watch. He didn’t see me hiding and drew the pool cue back with a lot of force – right into my eye. I was a mess.

**JOHN** I said, “Oh no! Mama’s gonna kill me!”
SAMMY  But when we got home, she wasn't mad at John. She was mad at me! I hurt for a long time. And that's why I don't play pool.

JOHN  On weekdays, we couldn't wait to get out of school and get to the Club. On Saturday mornings, we'd be there on our bikes waiting for it to open. There was so much to do. Football. Track. Broad jump. High jump. Softball. And, of course, swimming in the pool. Nude! ['Skinny dipping' was typical at this time for all-male organizations.] One of the guys would say, “I'm going for my chocolate dip!” There was so much chlorine in that pool that all of us black kids would just about be white when we got out.

SAMMY  But it wasn't just black kids at the Club. We were all together: black, white, Asian, Mexican. And more. We had a rainbow. We all got along.

JOHN  No one wanted to get out of line, even the “bad” kids. If you acted up, they'd take away your Boys Club card. Secretary Mabel Waring wouldn't let you in without it. The only way you could return was with your parents, so losing your Club privileges was worse than getting a whooping (which you'd probably get anyway once your parents found out you acted up at the Club).

SAMMY  John and our brother Teddy made beautiful wood tables with blue glass in the middle as well as footstools and other items. I made many things, too. We gave them to our mom and now we have them. Teddy won medals running track at the Club. It was an exciting place for all of us to be.

JOHN  We had memorable experiences. Like coming back from Pasadena tournaments and stopping at the Pike in Long Beach to play the games and ride the roller coaster that went out over the ocean.
SEAGOING SANTA CARRIES NEW KIND OF LOD—BOYS
Mob scene takes place at repair ship Delta’s Christmas party

Sammy Taylor, far left.
SAMMY  My favorite time was when the Navy officers would pick us up during the holidays and take us where the Navy Seals are based (where I’d later work). You had to be a Club member in good standing to go. It was an honor.

JOHN  They'd show us around the ship and give us a big turkey dinner.

SAMMY  John and I have put in a lot of time, money and physical labor at the Club. I keep the kids’ thank-you cards, but the biggest payback for us is investing in the youth of our community. Today's members don't come from the same cultural background and don't have the same exact experiences as we did, but we can give them something. We want them to get out of the Club what we got out of it.

JOHN  To say it right out, we had fun! Yes, we had fun!
CHAPTER 17

Soap Box Derby and Circus Fun
Soap Box Derby Entries Top 170

By ROBERT Mac DONALD

Entries for The Journal’s Third Annual Soap Box Derby, to be staged on Sixth Ave. between Jumper and Date July 24, have passed the 170 mark. The Derby is co-sponsored by local Chevrolet dealers. As boys between the ages of 11 and 15 work to get their cars in top form for the Big Day, word comes from Akron, Ohio, that 186 different cities are expected to send their champions to compete for the national title Aug. 15. Outside Akron, a special town just for the champions has been erected. Its name is Derbytown. The heart and brain of Derbytown will be in the All-American race will live three from Aug. 11 through race day.

Champions will arrive in Akron from all over the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Panama before Aug. 12, the final day to register in the eastern city. After they arrive at the camp, the boys will be supervised by Chevrolet officials and Y.M.C.A. counselors during their stay. Entertainment and recreation will be offered, as well as facilities for working on their cars in the camp. The All-American derby, slated to draw more than 100,000 persons to Akron, will be held at 2 p.m., Sunday, Aug. 16.

One San Diego boy who has hopes of winning this year’s prize is Manuel Garcia, a Boys Club member who is piloting his car for the San Diego Boys Club.

Manuel has been working for several months to make his vehicle one of the best to leave the starting ramp on July 24. He thinks he has a “pretty fair” chance of achieving his goal of winning the Nationals in Akron. Boys who have been building their cars last week were due to start through the Corvette dealers are urged to do it as soon as possible, so the time is growing short. If you haven’t registered for The Derby, do it today!

Soap Box Pilots Ready for Gun

By ROBERT Mac DONALD

Soap Box-Derby pilots all over San Diego are readying their cars for Big Race Day July 24. Indications are that the entry list will be almost double that of last year. More than 170 entries already are in for the Derby, sponsored locally by The Journal and Chevrolet dealers. Since Saturday’s inspection of racers at the East San Diego and downtown Firestone stores, many boys have telephoned to ask if they will be penalized for not bringing their cars to be checked by Boys Club officials.

Boys whose vehicles were not checked last Saturday will have to bring their cars to the site of the 1948 Derby early for a preliminary check. They will not be penalized—unless their cars do not meet specifications.

These boys who brought their cars in last Saturday and found that they had made a few errors in construction, have two weeks in which to get them right. Boys who wait until Derby Day will have little or no time to make corrections in their cars. If they cannot meet specifications, they will be disqualified.

"It is not our desire," said Chief Inspector Stanley Miller, handpicked supervisor of the city recreation department, "to keep any boy from racing his car, for either large or small infractions of the rules. However, these rules were set up so that the Derby would be a safe and sport event for every boy, regardless of his size or age. If a boy’s car is not considered safe and swifter, we will have no alternative but to disqualify him from the races.

Miller pointed out that all boys who neglected to have their cars examined last Saturday must bring their cars to the Fifth Ave. Park entrance to the Derby track not later than 7:30 a.m. July 24. If their cars are small, add on time there will be nets and tools for them to work with but very little time.

If any boy has major faults in his car, it is reasonable to assume, Miller said, that he will not be able to make the alterations in time for his qualifying run.

One boy who is making use of every minute between now and race time to get his race take shape for the Big Day is Raphael Cortell, a member of the Boys Club Inc. He is busy making sure that his streamlined appearance and running will be okayed the morning of the 24th.

Raphael, who thinks he has a good chance as everybody in the Club A competition, is one of 12 boys who will carry the Boys Club colors on the track this day of the Derby.

WITH ONLY A FEW DAYS left, Raphael Cortell, 14, gives his Soap Box Derby car its last checkup at the Boys Club speedworking shop. Young Cortell used the club facilities to build his entry car.
Al Bahr Temple Clowns Appear in Carnival Friday

The seven Al Bahr Temple Shrine Clowns will appear with style at Bernard dog Friday night at the annual Boys Club clown. "Big top" event also will include trained horses, aerial artists and a unicycle.

BOYS CLUB TO OBSERVE DATE WITH CIRCUS SHOW

Because a circus is a major event in the life of every boy, Directors of the Boys Club of San Diego selected a "Big Top" show and carnival to observe the fifth anniversary of the organization Friday night at the Club at 2930 Merry Ave.

Arthur Burnham, Chairman of the Circus Committee, promised two hours of entertainment featuring outstanding local performers and out-of-town talent.

Ronholm Brothers' 135-gross horse will play a concert and background music for the specialty numbers. Included in the talent array are Marzio Minchello, billed as "the world's oldest clown" with Ringling Brothers and Cirque Brothers' chimpanse, Bobbin Glimmer, a trick rope performer; Miss Lois Davis, 18, who jumps a horse through a fence built by trained polo horses by Walter Church, Mr. and Mrs. Al Onorato and Mrs. Arthur Jaffee.

Al Bahr Shrine clown, Bill Thompson, impersonator on the "Tobor" radio programs, Katherine Rinaldo and Dick Lykke, riding a unicycle, and Dave Kitchum, master of ceremonies.

Doors of the clubhouse were opened Nov. 11, 1941. In years of the community between the ages of 1 and 21, the membership has increased from 130 to 1256 boys of all ages and creeds, Burnham said.

This thrilling jump show will be among animal appearances in Bill Dedrick's miniature circus tomorrow night as one of the several acts in the third annual circus of the Boys Club of San Diego. Dedrick's ponies have performed with some of the leading circuses in the country.

BIG ACTS BOOKED FOR NIGHT

Circus to Offer Boys' Club Show

Thrilled ponies, clowns and the local children who are non-green members and members of the club will see the portable circus of the Boys Club of San Diego, which will play the Boys Club Building at 7 p.m., Saturday night as the Circus acts will be included in the program. It's third annual fundraiser and the educational theme event, which is being planned by Misses Mary and Martha at the Boys Club Building, is the Boys Club Building, which is the home of the Boys Club Building and the Boys Club Building.

Dedrick, the creator of the circus, is expected to attract a crowd of 500.

Carnival entertainment will be provided by the Boys Club Building, the Boys Club Building and the Boys Club Building.

Animals will be free to view guests and the cost of circus entertainment. The Boys Club members, past and present, will enjoy the circus entertainment. The Boys Club members, past and present, will enjoy the circus entertainment. The Boys Club members, past and present, will enjoy the circus entertainment.
TO THE CITIZENS OF SAN DIEGO, GREETINGS:

WHEREAS, communities all over the United States are paying tribute to youth by observing National Boys' Club Week—April 14th to 20th, 1947—with more than a quarter of a million boys participating in various type programs to demonstrate the vital part Boys' Clubs play in American life; and

WHEREAS, Boys' Club members are learning to use their leisure time in constructive activities and are proving that youth can live, work and play together in peace and harmony, regardless of Nationality or creed; and

WHEREAS, the theme of the week, "Building Citizens of Tomorrow," offers an admirable example of democracy in action; and

WHEREAS, the Citizens of San Diego are vitally interested in the youth of today, fully aware that youth needs understanding and guidance at all times from an adult population:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Harley E. Knox, as Mayor of the City of San Diego, am proud of the opportunity to proclaim the week of April 14th to 20th, 1947, as "Boys Club Week" in San Diego, and strongly urge support of and participation in this very worthwhile observance.

Harley E. Knox
Mayor
City of San Diego
San Diegan’s Boys’ Aid Recognized

William J. Oakes
organized club.

Oakes Will Get Service Award

Recognized for his outstanding service to the boys of San Diego, William J. Oakes will be awarded the Boys’ Club of America silver keystone tonight in Hollywood. The award will be made at a Southern California Boys’ Club Institute dinner at the Roosevelt Hotel.

The San Diego Boys’ Club was founded in 1898, largely through Oakes’ efforts. Oakes, now principal of Memorial Junior High School, was president of the Boys’ Club here from 1935 to 1947 and is now chairman of its board of trustees. He also is chairman of the club building committee.

San Diegans who will attend the institute, which opens in Hollywood this morning, are Mr. and Mrs. Oakes, Mr. and Mrs. George A. Scott, Mr. and Mrs. Roscoe Porter, Mr. and Mrs. C. A. Van Duseen, Mr. and Mrs. William C. Waring, James A. Robbins and Augustine Escamilla.

Principal speaker will be David W. Armstrong, of New York City, executive director of the Boys’ Clubs of America.

Oakes, World War I veteran, practiced law in San Diego from 1920 to 1923 and then entered the teaching profession here.
The Club's upward trajectory continued throughout the 1940s. With the country recovering from war, Americans were in search of fun, plenty of which was to be had at 2930 Marcy Avenue.

The mid-1940s saw Big Race Days each summer when more than 170 “pilots” ages 11-15 gathered in downtown San Diego for an annual Soap Box Derby. Several entrants were Boys Club kids who devoted their summer vacation to making cars under the tutelage of Club instructor Robert Bagley. In the Club's shop, they had easy access to drills, sanders, lathes and other tools needed to create their vehicles. Bagley helped each child one-on-one, saying they made “really fine racers.”

No articles announcing the winners have survived, but all the participants won a great deal: experience; self-esteem; and the joy of going downhill in a hand-built box car realllllllly fast!

Today, the Oakes Alumni Association sponsors two Southeast San Diego soap box derby competitions as part of their contributions to neighborhood youth.

In 1947, San Diego Mayor Harley E. Knox proclaimed April 14-20 “Boys Club Week in San Diego.” He said the Club “offers an admirable example of democracy in action” as it proves “that youth can live, work and play together in peace and harmony, regardless of nationality or creed.” Unspoken was the thought that adults seemed to find this concept much harder to attain.

To celebrate the Club’s fifth anniversary in November 1948, a Big Top Circus Show arrived to provide two hours of non-stop entertainment. Aerial artists, a unicyclist, clowns and other performers delighted the boys, who probably got their biggest thrill watching a beautiful young woman jump a horse through a fiery hoop.

Membership had increased to 1,336. The Club was aligned with the Community Chest, which ended 1948 by presenting a Christmas party, complete with candy-laden tree, gifts and “feats of magic.”

Today, news spreads in seconds via social media. Back in the 1940s, every time that Club activities or outstanding members were highlighted in a newspaper (the main source of local information), the good news went “viral” among readers. Virtually every household received at least one daily newspaper. Where folks once had read about the “juvenile delinquency” problem in Logan Heights, they were now regaled with success story after success story. Instead of seeing kids running from the police, they saw photographs of boys like Darnes Johnson, who as a teenager in 1948, was sprinting to track and field victories.

In recognition of William J. Oakes' efforts to provide a safe place for Logan Heights boys of different colors and cultures to grow, learn and achieve together, in 1949 he was awarded the Boys Club of America Silver Keystone. Principal Oakes surely cherished the honor, but he probably derived equal enjoyment walking through the Club after school and observing boys’ lives being changed for the better.
Entitled “Ebony Flash,” this award-winning photo of Darnes Johnson was taken under the expert tutelage of beloved Memorial Junior High School instructor Claude T. Burns in 1948.
CHAPTER 18

Looking Back; Looking Ahead
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AGAINST THE GRAIN

LOOKING BACK; LOOKING AHEAD

AGAINST THE GRAIN

The entrance to the San Diego Boys Club is the gateway to rare privileges reserved for members and occasional guests. It is located at 2500 Marcy Ave.

PAPER DRIVE SHOULD GO SWIMMINGLY

If San Diegans respond by getting their old papers and magazines bunched up now, activities like this have at the Boys' Club of San Diego can be magnified many times over. With proceeds of the club's news paper drive June 4 to 9, leaders hope to support their staff of supervisory personnel and instructors, teaching swimming skill and safety in the water to many more boys than can be handled with present facilities. The instructor here is John Plaza.

This happy sextet of Boys' Club members is trying some lusty harmonies, and learning that music is almost always a catalyst for enjoyable companionship.
The early 1950s was a time for the Boys Club to reflect on how far it had come and how much it had grown; and to envision how much more it could be and do in the future. Chet Van Dusen continued to excel as a Director, even carving out time amid his many duties to take kids on bike rides to exciting destinations.

Every year the Club accumulated new members; often existing members’ kid brothers, who were beyond eager to join. Each new boy would sign up, obtain his valued membership card and undergo formal induction rites. The fee remained $1 per year. If a boy was “flat broke,” staff would find him a job at the facility so he could earn the money to pay his fee and retain his self-respect.

The faces throughout the years show children of all colors who were proud of belonging and took full advantage of opportunities to learn new skills, make new – often lifelong – friends, engage in a variety of sports and have a great time.

Financial challenges still existed, not only in Logan Heights families, but at the Club. As before and afterward, aggressive fundraising and civic support were crucial in keeping the doors open.

**1953 ANNUAL REPORT HIGHLIGHTS KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

In November 1953, the Club published a glowing Annual Report. Board President Irving E. Friedman wrote, “During the eleven years the Boys Club has been open, 549,135 boys have checked in through the front door – and many of them have gone out to their place in the world of affairs – many of them in the service of their country, others to excel in sports, and still others to become professional, and men of business.” He praised the staff who took the time to listen to children’s problems and teach them “to play the game fair and square, to become part of a team.”

“In just 10 years, the Boys Club has won such prestige in the neighborhood that San Diego High School graduating classes insist that their graduation party be held at the Club. The boys want to bring their girls here and show off their club; they are that proud of it.”

— Boys Club Director Chet Van Dusen
BOYS’ CLUB OF SAN DIEGO

1953

GAME ROOM 3,620

PHYSICAL 110,754

HEALTH 11,289

MOVIES AND ARTS 11,289

SPECIAL EVENTS 23,514

TOTAL ACTIVITY 181,081

LIBRARY 1,206

DOOR 62,318

AGAINST THE GRAIN

SPECIAL EVENTS

ANNUAL CIRCUS
S. D. County Fair
Summer Camping
Radio Shows
Track Meet
New Member Party
Wiener Roast
Ocean Fishing Trips
Snow Trips
Halloween Party
Zoo Trip
Television Shows
Ping Pong Tournament
Boxing Tournaments
Leadership Training
Christmas Party
Ringling Bros. Circus
Wrestling Matches
Overnight Camps
He emphasized, “The Boys Club is the most ‘inclusive’ club in the world, for no boy is ever turned away from the Club, regardless of the color of his skin, his religious beliefs, or even his past record in the community.”

1953 had been a fun year. The Circus Committee chairman reported that the annual event attracted 3,500 children and adults and was quite successful: “The youngsters had a wonderful time as they consumed 1,900 hot dogs, 50 pounds of peanuts, 60 pounds of popcorn. In addition, they made quick work of 1,560 ice cream bars, 500 boxes of cracker jacks, 1,200 bottles of pop, as well as considerable cotton candy.”

The Club’s Health Department enjoyed a productive first year of operation. “The doctors and dentists were very generous in donating their time to give examinations” to 608 boys. Of those, “404 boys showed some correction needed – either physical or dental.” Through follow-up at home with the parents, corrections were made.

**CLUB FOUNDER DIES**

Sadly, just one month after the Annual Report showcased the accomplishments of the Boys Club, the man who was instrumental in its establishment died. After working so hard to see his Club succeed and the gym and pool he initially proposed finally open, William J. Oakes passed away at the age of 63 on December 5, 1953.

On October 22, 1954, the facility was named the William J. Oakes building in honor of its founder. Oakes might have liked seeing his name on the edifice. But by all accounts, this man who fought persistently and passionately to bring his vision to reality was as humble as his Boys Club of San Diego.

**CHANGE AGENTS FOR A BETTER TOMORROW**

In 1963, Civil Rights icon Martin Luther King Jr. eloquently expressed his dream: “That my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.”

Two decades earlier, Reverend King’s dream began taking shape on a modest but meaningful scale in the impoverished Logan Heights neighborhood of San Diego. William J. Oakes was an anomaly in his time: a white man who believed that people of all colors were created equal and deserved equal opportunities to succeed in life.

By establishing the Boys Club of San Diego, Oakes and his team went boldly against the grain of the era’s entrenched bigotry to offer a safe harbor where boys of all colors, creeds and nationalities were judged by the content of their character. The Club helped propel “everyday” kids to become assertive change agents for a more inclusive tomorrow.

Club alumnus David Woods notes, “True, many alumni went on to achieve celebrity, in sports and other fields. But there were also thousands of kids who went through the Club, learned and grew, had good experiences that influenced them, and became productive citizens of our society. That’s the profound impact of the Club: in all the people whose lives were changed for the better.”
When the San Diego City Council in 2012 unanimously approved the designation of the William J. Oakes Boys & Girls Club building as an historical landmark, one of its most successful alumni, Cecil Steppe, was in the Council Chambers audience, beaming.

Believing the designation validates not merely a red-brick building, but the shaping of young lives that occurred inside it, Steppe says, “I am forever grateful for the lessons learned at the Club that continue to guide my behavior, professionally and personally.”
Part Three: Standing Tall
CHAPTER 19

Careers and Character-Building Began at the Club
I believe the history of the Club and contributions of the Club’s alumni speak for themselves. Individuals who have made enduring contributions to their community and to mankind learned many of their values from selfless staff members who mentored them at the Club through their formative years.”

— Oakes Alumni Association Member Jack Henn

Club alumnus and 40 Acres of Memories author George Semper believed, “It is no accident that 40 Acres produced judges, doctors, lawyers, principals, teachers, professors, detectives, FBI agents, actors, preachers, writers, comedians, musicians, magicians, firemen, administrators, executives, scientists, school superintendents and more professional and [Amateur Athletic Union] AAU athletes than any other region in San Diego County.”

Most of these stellar adults experienced an auspicious start to their careers as youngsters at the Oakes Boys Club during its first one and one-half decades of existence. Leaping over the barriers of racial and class discrimination like the track and field stars many of them were, they became high-achievers at an early age and continued to accomplish much throughout their lives.

MIKE CAREY’S SUCCESS STARTED HERE

The names and photos of Oakes alumni who made it big in professional sports are featured at the Breitbard Hall of Fame in the San Diego Hall of Champions in Balboa Park. They also grace the Wall of Champions at the Club, where they serve as a daily inspiration to today’s youth.

One former Club kid who stands out in several categories is Mike Carey, an NFL referee, sports broadcaster, inventor and entrepreneur born in 1949. In 2008, he became the first Oakes alumnus inducted into the Boys & Girls Clubs of America Alumni Hall of Fame. He was lauded in these words: “NFL referee Mike Carey is respected throughout the league for his professionalism, preparation and sense of fair play – values made real at the William J. Oakes Boys Club, which he joined at the age of eight.”

After high school, Carey was a running back at Santa Clara University, where he graduated in
1971 with a B.S. in Biology. An ankle injury ended his playing career, but opened up a new world of possibilities. Beginning his officiating career with Pop Warner games in 1972, then moving up to the college level, Carey was hired by the NFL in 1990, becoming the second African-American NFL referee. In 2008, he became the first African-American to be head referee for a Super Bowl.

Carey reffed memorable games and was highly regarded by fellow refs and players alike. His focus on social justice led him to decline officiating at games that involved the Washington Redskins, an action in protest against the derogatory team name and logo.

After retiring from officiating in 2014, Carey became a football analyst for CBS Sports. He and his wife co-own Seirus Innovation, a snow sports accessories company. Among his several patented products is “Cat Tracks,” which slips over the sole of a ski boot to provide increased traction when walking.
CHAPTER 20

Athletes and So Much More
Grounded in sports and sportsmanship from an early age at the Oakes Club, these are some of the alumni who became notable athletes. In the 1950s and 1960s, there were fewer professional football, baseball and basketball teams in the country than there are today, so to make the pros, a player had to be exceptionally talented.

**JESSE COFFEY**

“Sweet Georgia Brown” was a memorable tune to Jesse Coffey, a 6-foot, 4-inch standout basketball player from San Diego High School who played professionally with the legendary Harlem Globetrotters from 1953-1961. This exhibition basketball team of black players is known worldwide for its brand of amazing athleticism and joyful play. For decades, the whistled version of the team’s signature song has heralded a night of comedic family entertainment. Coffey is on the All-Time Globetrotters Roster.

An early Club member, Coffey was looked up to by the younger kids. After his basketball career ended, he continued serving as a role model for youth. As noted in a 1992 Oakes Alumni publication, “For the past 20 years, Jesse has annually ‘adopted’ several young people and provided financial support for their athletic and educational needs. His encouragement and guidance have helped many youth from the community succeed in school and sports.”

**ROSCOE COOK, JR., PH.D.**

“Few athletes have surpassed Dr. Roscoe Cook’s career in track and field in the 130-year history of San Diego High School.” So read an obituary after Dr. Cook died at age 72 in December 2011. In addition to setting an array of track and field records, he was a member of the school’s 1955 National Championship football team.

Roscoe Cook continued his winning ways at the University of Oregon, where he tied world records in the 60- and 100-yard dash and received two All-American certificates while earning a degree in physical education. After receiving a Doctorate in Education from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, he served the Los Angeles Unified School District for 30 years. One year before Dr. Cook died, he was inducted into the University of Oregon’s Athletic Hall of Fame.
DAVID LEE GRAYSON

David Lee Grayson honed his football skills at San Diego and Lincoln High Schools, then signed with the University of Oregon as a halfback. Upon graduation, he played for four years with the American Football League (AFL) Dallas Texans/Kansas City Chiefs before joining the Oakland Raiders in 1965.

Grayson made his mark as a defensive halfback in dramatic fashion. He held the AFL record for longest interception return for a touchdown (99 yards), was a six-time All-Star, became the AFL’s leader in interceptions and accomplished other remarkable feats, resulting in his being named to the All-Time Team.

The Grayson football legacy continued when his son, David Lee Grayson, Jr., played in the NFL for several seasons, including a 1991 stint with the San Diego Chargers.

NEALE (BOBO) HENDERSON

One might say that Bobo Henderson’s baseball career began in 1937 when he was seven years old and living in Fort Smith, Arkansas. The Negro League’s Kansas City Monarchs came to town. When the players got off the bus, young Bobo boldly asked to be their bat boy. They said yes!

Fast-forward to 1949 in San Diego where the Henderson family now lived. After batting .539 as a shortstop at San Diego High School and being named to the All-Southern California Interscholastic Federation team, Bobo Henderson was recruited to play with the Kansas City Monarchs. He said yes! Seemingly impervious to the color barrier that prevented him from playing in the Major Leagues, Henderson later told the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, “My dream came true!”

In 2008, Henderson participated in a moving ceremonial draft spearheaded by Hall of Famer Dave Winfield, then Vice President of the San Diego Padres, to honor black and Latino baseball players who had been barred from the Major Leagues. In this year in which America elected its first black President, Henderson and others told, without rancor but with candor, how they were unable to sleep in motels or eat in restaurants. They said “they traveled the country playing ball for the love of the game and sleeping for weeks in team buses.”
WALLACE (WALLY) HENRY

Born in 1954, Wally Henry attended Lincoln High School, then played football at UCLA. He was a wide receiver for six seasons with the NFL Philadelphia Eagles. During that time, he played in the Pro Bowl as a kick returner.

CHARDE HOUSTON

WNBA player Charde Houston is a formidable presence on the basketball court, and a fashion trendsetter, philanthropist and entrepreneur off the court. Last playing for the New York Liberty, Houston overcame a tough childhood that began in Oceanside, where she was born in 1986, and included bouts of homelessness when her family lost their San Diego home in the late 1990s. Houston cared for her younger brothers while her mom worked three jobs, bringing the boys with her to basketball practice. At San Diego High School from 2000-2004, she set the state scoring record of 3,837 points.

An Oakes alumnus, Houston was the first in her family to graduate from high school, then made a name for herself playing basketball at the University of Connecticut while earning a degree in Sociology. In 2008, the Minnesota Lynx selected her in the third round of the draft.

As outstanding an athlete as she is, Charde Houston is an even more outstanding human being. Building on the empathy gained from her difficult early years, she created a nonprofit organization to educate, motivate and empower youth to excel in school and in life. She has received leadership awards for her service and turned heads for her fashionista sense of style, leading this multi-talented woman to establish a shopping website as unique as she is.

NEAL PETTIES

Football was Neal Petties’ game at San Diego High School, where he captured All-American honors, then at SDSU, where he played from 1961-1963, leading the team in receptions and receiving yards each season. He set a long-held record of 63 catches for 1,274 yards and 13 touchdowns. With stats like that, it’s no surprise that Petties was named three times to the All-California Collegiate Athletic Association (CCAA) or that he helped the SDSU Aztecs achieve a 22-6-1 record, enabling the school to capture two CCAA titles during his tenure.

Petties was snapped up in the 1964 draft by the NFL Baltimore Colts, where he played for three seasons. He was inducted into the Aztecs Hall of Fame in 2006.
At his funeral in September 2014, actor Jon Voight (father of Angelina Jolie) was a pallbearer. This gentle (when out of the ring) giant’s lifetime accomplishments were celebrated in the New York Times, Los Angeles Times and other major media. His life was recalled with affection, tears and a good bit of laughter by those who knew Charlie Powell long before he became what the UT San Diego lauded as “the greatest athlete ever to come out of San Diego County.” They knew him as a kid growing up alongside them at the Boys Club. His brothers were also Club members and standout athletes from an early age. But Charlie Powell became an icon; one of America’s greatest.

Born in 1932 in Texas, Powell and his family moved to Logan Heights in 1937. When the Boys Club opened in 1942, Charlie Powell was there. He enjoyed a variety of Club activities while he attended Memorial Junior High School and San Diego High School. Powell participated in all Club activities and remembered the Club “as a place where members were a mixture of nationalities, where everyone played harmoniously and where both English and Spanish were commonly spoken.”

A charismatic figure from his earliest days who drew people to him with his ubiquitous smile, in high school Powell lettered in football, baseball, basketball, and track and field. He declined scholarship offers from prestigious schools such as Notre Dame and UCLA as well as a try-out with the Harlem Globetrotters so he could play a season as a slugger/outfielder with the St. Louis Browns. Rumor has it that he once hit a home run not just out of a ballpark, but over the highway cloverleaf beyond it!

After baseball, Powell helped break the National Football League’s (NFL’s) color barrier as a seven-year defensive end with the San Francisco Forty-Niners, followed by a stint with the Oakland Raiders. During the off-season, he was a prolific boxer. In 39 professional fights, this heavyweight notched a 25-11-3 record. He knocked out 17 opponents and boxed against two future champs: Muhammad Ali and Floyd Patterson.
As great an athlete as Charlie Powell was, everyone who knew him said he was an even greater human being. When this trailblazer was inducted into the San Diego Hall of Fame, he asked his Club mentor Augie Escamilla to introduce him.

Charlie Powell credited his career success “to the starting point of my life at the Club. It was a place where I learned and grew as an athlete; where I made friends of a diverse background and learned the social skills of getting along with all people.”

ART POWELL

Art Powell was a bit of a late bloomer as a sports star, but way ahead of the curve as a Boys Club kid. When the Club opened in 1942, Art was only five years old (admission age was seven). He wanted to join so badly that his older brothers Ellsworth and Charlie fibbed about Art’s age to receptionist Mabel Waring, who (probably knowing the truth) smiled and said, “We’d best get you a card then.”

With his brothers as role models and the Club’s Athletic Director, Augie Escamilla, teaching him how to dribble and shoot a basketball, Art Powell’s first love was hoops, with football a close second. He played both sports a lot at the Club, but did not start on San Diego High School’s basketball team until his junior year, or the football team until his senior year, when he played on a legendary team with stars like Willie West.

It was at San Diego City College that Art Powell’s athletic talents became more fully developed. He averaged 40 points a game in basketball and perfected his play at running back and flanker positions in football. He played football at San Jose State University and in the Canadian league before being drafted as a wide receiver by the Philadelphia Eagles. He ultimately played in both the AFL and NFL for a variety of teams. He led the AFL in receiving touchdowns in 1960 and in receiving yards in 1962 with the New York Titans (now the New York Jets), then led in both categories when he moved to the Oakland Raiders in 1963. While with that team, he refused to play in an exhibition game in Alabama as a protest against the stadium’s segregated seating.

During his four seasons with the team, Powell notched Raider records that stood for decades. He was inducted into the Hall of Champions at the San Diego Hall of Fame in 1992, and, like his brother, Charlie, asked Augie Escamilla to introduce him. Less than one year after Charlie Powell died in 2014, Art Powell died in 2015.
GENE RICHARDSON

Born in 1928, Gene Richardson was one of the Logan Heights kids so excited to watch the Boys Club being built that he was tapped to unload the bricks under the watchful eye of a worker warning him not to drop any “because they cost two cents each.” He later said that he and his pals “could hardly wait for the Club to open.”

From an early age, Richardson was known for his hard-throwing left arm. His pitching catapulted San Diego High School’s baseball team to the State Championship in 1946. In the final game, which San Diego won 18-0, he struck out 19 and came within one scratch single of a perfect game. This occurred in his senior year, which, incredibly, was his first year playing varsity. For his feats, Richardson received the pinnacle of accolades, being named Southern California’s Player of the Year.

In his first few years of pro ball, with the color barrier firmly entrenched, Richardson played with the Negro League’s Kansas City Monarchs. As a 21-year-old, he out-pitched famous white hurler Bob Feller in an exhibition game between the Negro League and Major League. Eventually, Major League teams courted Richardson, but, with the Negro League diminishing as a result of the opening of opportunities to black players, the Monarchs refused to release him.

One of Gene Richardson’s performance secrets was a concoction of goose grease, wintergreen, turpentine, Sloan’s Liniment and other magical ingredients that the trainer of famous pitcher Satchel Paige shared with him as a cure for sore arms. Over his life, which ended in 1997, he helped ease the pain of many high school pitchers with his red hot balm, earning him the nickname “Medicine Man.”

JOHN RITCHEY

A newspaper article about the 1948 San Diego Padres noted, “Quiet, unassuming John Ritchey, the first Negro baseball player to perform in the Pacific Coast League (PCL), feels at home in a San Diego uniform.”

This was just one year after Jackie Robinson broke Major League Baseball’s color barrier when he started at second base for the Brooklyn Dodgers on April 15, 1947. Like Robinson, PCL catcher Ritchey faced deplorable name-calling from fans at the ballpark, recalls his nephew and Club alumnus Ed Fletcher.
“I watched my Uncle John play at Lane Field. It was bittersweet because he played so well despite the insults hurled at him from the stands. Even worse was the treatment he endured from players on opposing teams and even some of his teammates. Once, I mentioned a white ballplayer whom I idolized and my uncle told me straight out that the guy was one of the worst.”

At age 23 in 1948, John Ritchey had already faced a great deal of discrimination with uncommon grace. As a student, he had been barred from playing football championships in the South. He served in the military with distinction in World War II, but returned home to encounter the same racial inequality as his fellow soldiers of color.

Nevertheless, when Ritchey quietly but resolutely broke San Diego’s baseball color line, he impressed the team and fans with his skills behind and at the plate; and with his inner dignity.

Before breaking the PCL color barrier, Ritchey played in the Negro League, where in 1947 he led the league with a .369 batting average, despite facing formidable pitchers like Satchel Paige and Don Newcombe. With stats like that, as a writer declared, “The San Diego Padres could no longer ignore this awesome talent. They had to have this young hometown Superstar!”

John Ritchey’s older brother, Bert, broke barriers of his own. He was one of the first African-American police officers in San Diego and later became a prominent attorney.

FLOYD ROBINSON

Floyd Robinson exemplifies the William J. Oakes Alumni Association motto: “From Oakes We Receive – To Oakes We Give.” A Club member during the late 1940s and early 1950s, he has given back to the Club, youth, seniors and the entire San Diego community. The many good works this humble man has accomplished have been done quietly, without fanfare.

As a young sports icon, Robinson attracted fanfare aplenty. A Major League Baseball outfielder who batted left-handed and threw right-handed, Robinson starred in baseball and football at San Diego High School. He turned down a University of Arizona football scholarship to pursue pro baseball.

He signed with the Minor League San Diego Padres straight out of high school in 1954. In 1956, the fleet-footed flash was the subject of a column by respected
San Diego sportswriter Jack Murphy, who called Robinson “the little jackrabbit out of San Diego High School.” Murphy wrote, “You look at Floyd Robinson flying around the base paths … and you wonder why they even bother to pay the salary of the other centerfielders.”

Robinson hit the “bigs” with the Chicago White Sox in 1960. In 1961, his first full year in the majors, he posted a .310 batting average, hit 11 home runs and tied for third as American League Rookie of the Year.

Robinson enjoyed a career year in 1962. He led the league in doubles, was fourth in RBIs and became one of 25 players to get six hits in six at-bats in a nine-inning game. He batted .312, second to that year’s batting champion.

Robinson played for the White Sox until 1966, followed by brief stints with the Cincinnati Reds, Oakland Athletics and Boston Red Sox. After two surgeries on his knee, he retired from baseball in 1969 and was inducted into the San Diego Breitbard Hall of Fame in 2009.

Beginning in the mid-1960s, Floyd and his wife Sandra have been committed to building affordable housing and promoting community economic development, much of it in Southeast San Diego. Their Robinson Development and Construction Company invests in real estate and apartment buildings. It built the Golden Age Garden complex, which provides charming, HUD-subsidized apartments to low-income seniors.

Robinson also owned and operated an eponymous market in Southeast San Diego. “[Floyd] was more of a social worker at the store,” wife Sandra reported. “People in the neighborhood would come by and say, ‘Mr. Robinson, I can’t pay my electric and gas bill this month.’ He would hand them money over the counter.”

As he confided to sportswriter Tom Shanahan in 2008, Robinson’s focus on building up his communities through real estate goes back generations. “My great, great, great grandfather was a slave who bought property in Arkansas after the Emancipation Proclamation.”

He also has been active in youth sports and has served on the boards of organizations such as the Southeast Development Committee and Far-West International Optimists. In 2007, the Robinsons established the nonprofit Floyd Robinson Foundation, which annually gives a generous donation to the Oakes and Encanto Boys & Girls Club branches.

On a recent visit to his boyhood Oakes Club, Robinson showed Club staff his favorite spots, including the outdoor areas where he perfected his baseball and
football skills. He laughed when he pointed out the location of the former boxing ring in what is now a Head Start room.

He recalled, “One time I was boxing an older kid. It got rough. He beat me up pretty good. I lost the fight. Under the floor that’s there now lie my blood, sweat and tears!”

**WILLIE WEST**

Willie West was born in Lexington, Mississippi in 1938. He subsequently moved with his family to Logan Heights, where he was a regular at the Club and enjoyed many activities; notably, football. He attended college on a football scholarship at the University of Oregon in Eugene, where he currently resides. Before helping put the Oregon football team on the national map, he was a running back at San Diego High School, which fielded the number one team in the nation in 1955. It is still renowned as one of the best football teams to ever come out of San Diego County.

West played professional football for nine seasons. A defensive back, he began with the St. Louis Cardinals in 1960-1961; then played with the Buffalo Bills, 1962-1963; Denver Broncos, 1964; New York Jets, 1964-1965; ending his career with the Miami Dolphins, 1966-1968. West went out with a bang during his final season, achieving 102 yards in four interceptions for an average of 25.5 yards per interception.

West always held a special place in his heart for the Oakes Club. He explains, “As a young man growing up in Logan Heights in the 1940s and 1950s, the Boys Club provided a place of refuge, mentorship and education for young people in need of nurturing. The experiences and friendships I forged have been a positive force in my life. The Club’s role in molding young men and women into model citizens contributing to our society cannot be over-emphasized. Its influence on children has made a powerful impact on the community.”
ARTHUR (HAMBONE) WILLIAMS

Before he became a point guard in the NBA – with the San Diego Rockets from 1967-1970 and Boston Celtics from 1970-1974 – Arthur Williams, born in 1939, was a transplant from Bonham, Texas to Logan Heights who wandered into a 1953 flag football game at the Boys Club field. As the story goes, someone yelled out “Hambone!” and Arthur was the only kid who looked up, so the name stuck. Today, he chuckles, “If someone says ‘Arthur,’ I don’t even turn around.”

It soon became apparent, to everyone at the Club and far beyond, that Hambone’s true sport was basketball. He dazzled on the court at San Diego High School, doing everything with a unique flair. He could run, jump, shoot and had what an admiring sports reporter called “sleight-of-hand passing that was a sight to behold.”

After attending Cal Poly Pomona, he worked at several jobs in San Diego while dreaming of the NBA. When he finally made the Rockets as a 28-year-old rookie, Williams made the most of the opportunity, finishing sixth in the league in assists. In 1974, his last year with the Celtics, he helped the team win the NBA Championship.

Looking back on his NBA experience, Williams says one of the best things about his career was being exposed to so many people and places. He reports, “I got to see a lot of the world.”

Although basketball was his claim to fame, Williams enjoyed a variety of activities at the Club throughout junior high and high school. “I swam, ran track, played softball, made things in wood shop, shot pool, and had a good time with guys I have remained friends with.”

Williams felt so close to the Oakes Club that after he retired from professional basketball, he returned to work at the facility where he’d grown up. “I was a recreation employee under Executive Director Joe Jacobs,” he relates, saying he really enjoyed playing basketball with the kids.

Did they call him Hambone? “Of course!”

An Oakes Alumni Association Board member, Williams says he and his colleagues feel a strong connection to their origins. “We were raised up together at the Club. We’re back together now, helping to raise up a new generation.”
CHAPTER 21

Creating a Finer San Diego, and a Better World
Alumni from Boys & Girls Clubs across the nation have made a name for themselves; some are recognized around the globe. They include Smokey Robinson, Queen Latifah, Martin Sheen, Michael Jordan, Jennifer Lopez, Morgan Freeman, Denzel Washington and “hometown hero” Mario Lopez, who was a star wrestler at the Chula Vista Boys & Girls Club.

San Diego County Board Supervisor Ron Roberts was a member of the Linda Vista Club. Praising the organization, he said, “[My] goal in government is to make the future for today’s children as bright as it was for [me] growing up in the community.”

Oakes provided a fertile environment for future success. An incredible number of alumni excelled in their chosen field. Among the erudite educators, attorneys, law enforcement officials, military personnel, businessmen and civic leaders are the following people of diverse ethnicities who “made it good” while making life much better for their fellow man.

**EDWARD (ED) FLETCHER**

When Ed Fletcher was born in 1931, his family lived on Franklin Street, just one block from the 40 Acres that would encompass the (Oakes) Boys Club of San Diego.

“I remember when the 40 Acres was mostly one big field. When the circus came to town, it would set up in the middle of the field. Going to the circus is one of my favorite memories,” recalls this ebullient, accomplished man who continues to put in his five daily miles of running/walking and who has always viewed the glass as half-full rather than half-empty.

“Of course I experienced some racism, as did all African-Americans in San Diego, and in all of America, but I adhered to the advice my grandfather gave me. He said, ‘You can be and do anything you want, if you work hard. If you expect positive things, you’ll find positive things.’ My parents also instilled in me the right kind of attitude needed to lead a successful life.”

Fletcher not only built a successful life for himself and his family; as an educator, he helped thousands of students carve out their own path to success. An outstanding football player, an excellent student who earned a Master’s Degree at San Diego State University, and a patriotic American who joined the Marine Corps in 1952 and remained active in the Reserve until retiring as a Colonel in 1991, Fletcher devoted 36 years to San Diego City Schools (now San Diego Unified School District), beginning as a teacher and ultimately serving as Director of Health Services.

He used his interpersonal expertise and proactive approach as 1977-1983 Assistant Superintendent for Community Relations, where he was responsible for the development and implementation of a district-wide Voluntary Racial Integration Program. Earlier, he served as an Immigration Officer at the U.S./Mexico border and also was a basketball referee. Later, he served in leading capacities on the boards...
of many civic organizations, including the Mayor’s African-American Advisory Committee and Downtown San Diego Lion's Club.

Ed Fletcher began honing his life-enhancing skills as a charter member of the Oakes Club. “I was there the first day it opened,” he relates. “I played sports. I made things in the shop. One of my favorite places was the book nook. I would go in there and read, fueling a lifelong habit. I still read a lot.”

He notes, “At the Club and at school, the population was approximately 50 percent Caucasian and 50 percent African-American and Latino, with a smattering of other nationalities. We all got along.”

Fletcher carried that feeling of camaraderie across color lines with him when he entered the Marines. He says, “When a white buddy of mine and I went to Quantico, Virginia for Officers Training School, we got on a train. This being the south in the 1950s, we were told that I needed to go to ‘the Negro Car’ and my friend to ‘the White Car.’ My friend opted to join me in the Negro Car.”

During the same era, when Ed and his wife Bess Fletcher traveled cross-country, they relied on the now-collectible Negro Motorist Green Book to steer them to the very limited array of hotels, restaurants and gas stations that welcomed black travelers along Route 66. “I still have my 1950 copy,” reveals Fletcher, pondering its current appraised value. (A 1941 edition recently sold for $22,000 to the Smithsonian.)

Fletcher has received many accolades. He says, “In 1993, it was my pleasure to be honored as a Boys Club of San Diego Hall of Fame inductee. Recently, as a member of the Boys and Girls Foundation, which provides funding for programs that benefit at-risk youth, I enjoyed being able to give back to the Club organization that nurtured me when our Foundation gave Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater San Diego (BGCSD) $75,000 to purchase transportation vans.”

Giving back and paying forward has been a driving force in Ed Fletcher’s life. A father of three daughters and a son, he inculcated in his children and four grandchildren the same positive attitude he learned as a child.

“The kids and grandkids often call and ask for advice,” he says. “I’ve always told them: Don’t let race hold you back.”
HONORABLE EARL GILLIAM

Before becoming a respected judge, Earl Gilliam was an honor student who graduated from San Diego High School in 1949, where he participated in football, basketball and track while working at his family’s fish market on Imperial Avenue. He began decades of distinguished public service in 1957, when as a graduate of Hastings School of Law, he was appointed Deputy District Attorney for the County of San Diego.

In 1963, Judge Gilliam became the first African-American appointed to the San Diego Municipal Court, where he was elected Presiding Judge in 1971. He continued moving up the legal ladder with an appointment to the Superior Court in 1975. In 1980, President Jimmy Carter appointed him to the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California. He remained a member of the Federal branch until his death in 2001.

Judge Gilliam generously shared his wide-ranging expertise. He taught for nearly one-quarter of a century at Western State University College of Law, which named a courtroom in his honor. Among the many beneficiaries of his time and wisdom was the Oakes Club, where he had enjoyed many years as a youth and gave back as a Board member. In 1981, he received the Club’s Golden Achievement Award. Among his numerous judicial and civic leadership awards, Judge Gilliam received the 1995 NAACP’s Civil Rights Pioneer Award.

HONORABLE NAPOLEON JONES, JR.

The son of a carpenter and a housekeeper from a small town in Louisiana, Napoleon (Nap) Jones traveled far in his life’s journey from 1940-2009. At age two, his family moved to Logan Heights, where he eagerly awaited turning seven so he could join the Boys Club.

Although far from the biggest kid at the Club, “Nap was not to be messed with,” recall his fellow members, who admired their friend’s wrestling and boxing abilities. At San Diego High School, he was on the State Champion varsity wrestling team.

Club alumnus Dean Hancock, who lived across the street from the Jones family, says he could see that his friend was special even at an early age. “Napoleon was small in stature, but big in heart. And never too big, when he became a success, to forget where he came from. When the Oakes Alumni Association tackled repairs at the facility, Napoleon was right there with us; digging in a ditch.”
After earning his B.A. and M.A. at San Diego State University, Jones served as a social worker until a career-defining moment in 1968. When utility companies considered cutting off services to welfare recipients, this idealistic man felt compelled to enter law school so he could pursue social justice issues from a legal perspective. He recalled, “It was the motivation that gave me the impetus to pursue a dream.”

Judge Jones’ quest for equality for all attracted the attention of high-level politicians. When he was appointed to serve on the San Diego Municipal Court, he became the second African-American to do so. The first was Boys Club alumnus Earl Gilliam, in whose footprints Judge Jones would continue to follow. In 1994, President Bill Clinton nominated Judge Jones to fill a seat vacated by Judge Gilliam on the U.S. District Court.

On the court, Judge Jones won the respect of colleagues on both sides of law enforcement. For years, he continued to live in Logan Heights, not far from the Club he couldn’t wait to join.

As noted in 40 Acres of Memories, “While there seemed to be a tinge of embarrassment for some to say they lived in Logan Heights, that was erased when they could say with pride, ‘We live in Logan Heights where Judge Jones lives.’”
FREDDIE HAYES

In 1947, a high school dropout who’d run away from Los Angeles found a home at 2930 Marcy Avenue. Twenty years later, Freddie Hayes became a full-circle achiever when he returned to run the Boys Club that had helped him find a purpose in life.

Hayes was eight years old when his mother died. He was raised by an aunt. In his teens, he was on a downward spiral, he confided in a 1967 San Diego Evening Tribune article. “I was just a kid who didn’t know what to do with myself. I had as great an opportunity to go bad as anyone.”

The Club’s playground and gym became Freddie’s “classroom” where he learned to box. He became proficient, capturing Golden Glove trophies in 1947 and 1948. A mentor steered him on a path to the Navy, San Diego City College and San Diego State University.

Armed with an education and a love of sports, Hayes worked as a sports editor for a weekly newspaper and public relations director for San Diego County’s Economic Opportunity Commission. In 1967, he was appointed Branch Manager of the Oakes Boys Club where he’d grown from a child into a man.

At that time, more than 750 of the 2,000 boys, most of them African-American (as was Hayes) and Mexican-American, were children living in broken homes. He empathized, noting, “To a boy, it’s a big thing … what all youths want and need is an understanding adult in whom they can confide and someone who understands their problems.”

Freddie Hayes believed it was his mission to make a difference. His own mentor, he said, “changed my whole life.” Now here he was, changing the lives of a new generation of young boys.

STAN MURPHY

In 2005, Stan Murphy, a 28-year teacher at his alma mater, San Diego High School, was named California Teacher of the Year and one of four finalists for National Teacher of the Year.

Murphy did not just teach history; he enabled his students to live it, giving them experiences that shaped their perspective of the world and their place within it. He annually escorted 11th-graders
on a five-day trip to visit college campuses with tours provided by San Diego High alumni. He developed sister school programs in Russia, Argentina and Austria, and created the first secondary educational exchange program between the Soviet Union and the U.S. Closer to home, he went against the grain of conventional thinking about “problem” kids when he created an innovative program in which at-risk seniors tutored elementary students in reading.

Years before he became a teacher who was beloved by his students, valued by his colleagues and honored at the White House by President George W. Bush, Stan Murphy was a Logan Heights kid sneaking into the Oakes Boys Club at age six. His older brother was a member, and little Stan later acknowledged he wanted to get in on the fun. At age seven, he officially became a member and spent almost every day at the Club during the next several years.

After graduating from San Diego High, where he lettered in four varsity sports and excelled academically, Murphy received an athletic/academic scholarship to UC Berkeley, where he was an All-American football player and a member of the Pac 10 All-Academic Team. He earned a B.A., teaching credential and a Master’s in Education, and spent his entire career at San Diego High.

When he was recognized as Teacher of the Year, Murphy told the Boys & Girls Club of Greater San Diego that he “learned so many things from the Oakes Club that he attributes to his success in life … teamwork, friendship and community service.”

Stan Murphy came a long way in life: from a little kid mischievously sneaking in the Club doors to an inspirational teacher who opened doors of opportunity to countless students.

CECIL STEPPE

As a child growing up on Imperial Avenue (then known as “Black Broadway”) in Logan Heights, Cecil Steppe, born in 1933, donned a suit and tie to watch, listen and learn at the Women’s Civic League. The League was founded by his activist aunt Rebecca Craft to counter the absence of African-Americans within the fabric of San Diego institutions.

Today, as Chairman of the Board of Gompers Preparatory Academy, a UCSD Partnership School in Southeast San Diego, Steppe proudly observes 1,200 well-comported students in grades 6-12 dressed for success as they enter the “Gates of Wisdom” and prepare themselves to pursue their college and career dreams. Virtually 100 percent of the students at this San Diego Unified School District charter school graduate and gain acceptance to one or more colleges.
To a casual observer, Cecil, the youngest of three sons of a hard-working, self-reliant single mother, might not have appeared likely to have a 100 percent chance of success. San Diego was segregated in multiple ways that were severely separate and unequal.

“National City was the ‘Redneck Capital of the West’ – a place where black motorists rolled up their windows and kept on going,” Steppe recalls. “You couldn’t be ‘caught’ in places like Coronado after dark. There were no black teachers or police officers. In fact, the Chief of Police bragged he’d never hire a black officer.”

The Women’s Civic League determined to change the environment from an “illusion of equality that did not exist.” It did, and stalwart citizens such as Cecil Steppe benefited from their efforts. In turn, the community and all of San Diego have benefited from his decades of dedicated service.

Steppe and his friends watched the construction of the Boys Club while playing baseball at the “Shack,” a nearby recreational site. As soon as the Club opened, he joined, playing football and basketball. He high-jumped, ran track and found an inclusive place where he belonged.

He says, “The Club provided recreation and guidance; it inculcated a sense of connectedness. We were a mix of races who shared something in common: poverty.”

Like other Club members, Cecil Steppe idolized Athletic Director Augie Escamilla. “Augie was a father figure to me. He demonstrated the values of what a man should be. My mother was strict, so Augie would come to our house to convince her to allow me to go out of town for tournaments.”

From a young age, Steppe was a leader; he was student body president of Stockton (now King) Elementary School. He also was a hard worker. As a teen, he worked as a tailor’s apprentice (“I still hem my own cuffs”), busboy, janitor, at Earl Gilliam’s father’s fish shop and several other jobs; first while in high school and then at San Diego Junior College. He served as a cryptographer in the Air Force from 1952-1956 during the Korean conflict, then earned an AA and BA in Sociology.

Steppe worked in key positions for the County of San Diego for 35 illustrious years. Between 1980-1992, he served as Chief Probation Officer – the sixth African-American Probation Officer and second-longest Chief. In 1992, he became the County’s Director of Social Services, where, building on the inclusiveness he’d experienced at the Club, he brought together County departments, schools, City agencies and private sector organizations to share in the responsibility of providing social and health services to families. After retiring from the County in 1999 leaving a legacy that stands strong today, he became President and CEO of the San Diego Urban League.

Steppe has been featured on TV and in magazines, and hailed as one of 100 African-American Role Models in San Diego. He was named Rotary’s “Mr. San Diego” in 2004. He has served on boards of numerous organizations, including the San Diego Justice Foundation, Vista Hills Foundation, YMCA, Junior Achievement and
Super Bowl Task Force. He has more award plaques than he has walls on which to display them, and says he cherishes “my most meaningful accolade: the Diogenes Award for open and honest communication.”

At Gompers, Steppe has been instrumental in transforming a failing, unsafe campus into a high-achieving academy praised by civic leaders and politicians. He helped propel the transformation in 2005 and remains active there today.

Cecil Steppe is a shining example of how working assiduously to make things better, having a positive attitude and acting upon the belief that all things are possible can change lives.
TWO BESTS

Two Club alumni born in the year the Oakes Boys Club opened, 1942, became best friends in kindergarten. They remained best buddies throughout their Club and school (Stockton Elementary, Memorial Junior High, San Diego High and San Diego State University) years, served as best man at each other’s wedding and are still close friends.

Although Willie Horton now lives in Poway and Thomas (Tommy) Logans in Houston, they continue to keep in touch. Both have achieved high levels of success. And both have fond recollections of their boyhood home-away-from-home: the Club.

WILLIE HORTON

As a child, Willie Horton lived between 31st and 32nd Street and Imperial Avenue, eight blocks from the Club. In 1950, already a talented violinist (he began playing at the age of six and continues to play and perform today), Horton joined the Club because, as he recalls, “I wanted to learn how to swim. I asked my mother to please give me 50 cents so I could become a member.”

Horton enjoyed swimming and playing ping pong throughout his early teens at the Club during Joe Jacobs’ tenure as Executive Director. “Joe was
tough, but fair. He knew all the boys by name. We respected him.”

His home life paralleled the Club in that his mother, Carrie Horton, expected a great deal from her son because she had high hopes for him. Horton reveals, “My father was a Chief Petty Officer in the Navy. He told me he would have achieved a much higher rank if he’d been the ‘right’ color. This was the reality for those times. But my violin proficiency opened doors of opportunity; people who heard me looked beyond my color. Education opened even more doors. My mother was PTA president at all three of my schools and made sure the teachers held me to the highest academic standards. The minute I walked in the door at home, she would say, ‘Sit down and do your school work.’ ”

Horton’s hard work, and his mother’s attentiveness, paid off. After graduating from SDSU with a degree in Education, Horton matriculated at UCLA’s Dental School for a time, then returned to his first love: education. He earned a Master’s in Biology and served as a teacher, vice principal and principal while amassing an array of teaching credentials and authoring scientific articles. He currently is an Adjunct Professor at National University and also instructs students at the San Diego Juvenile Court school. He has been widely recognized and much awarded as an education pioneer and has served on boards of several organizations, including the NAACP and San Diego Youth Symphony.

Having devoted his life to “bridging the gap between the Haves and Have-Nots,” Horton developed an innovative program that motivates students with behavioral issues to take responsibility for their actions and get back on track by adhering to core values.

Willie Horton says that hearing and meeting Martin Luther King in 1964 was a seminal moment. “Dr. King’s assertion that ‘injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere’ is something I took to heart as an educator. Dr. King was my role model.”

To students whose destiny has been changed from a Have-Not to a Have thanks to this committed educator, Willie Horton is their role model.

THOMAS (TOMMY) LOGANS

Like his friend Willie Horton, Tommy Logans was an early achiever who continued to excel in school, college and career. While Horton perfected his violin virtuosity, Logans, the second youngest of seven boys and two girls growing up in a hard-working, two-parent family that lived on 29th Street and Imperial Avenue, was
honing the wrestling skills that, along with his academic achievements, would win him a scholarship at SDSU.

“The Club was my opening into athletics,” Logans recalls, saying that one of the fun games they played was “red ball,” a baseball-like sport in which teams competed in the gym by using their fist instead of a bat to hit a little red rubber ball. As important as sports – perhaps more so, believes Logans – was “getting my first exposure to things like wood shop, metal shop, field trips to the Naval ships and, through school, the downtown financial district. These activities broadened my world and enlarged my scope of possibilities.”

After serving as class president throughout his junior high years and excelling in several sports in high school, ultimately being named a San Diego High Athlete of the Century, Logans was the first in his family to attend college. At SDSU, he initially pursued a double major in Education/Pre-Dental and a double minor in Chemistry and Social Sciences.

He eventually opted for education, teaching for a year before utilizing his chemistry background to transition to sales and marketing for Pfizer, Inc. Then, he held a high-level position reporting to the President and Vice President of Levi Strauss & Co. in San Francisco, where as Affirmative Action Director he successfully recruited women and minorities to the sales force.

For the past 25 years, Logans has been co-owner of Houston-based Access Data Supply, a construction-related company with a wide variety of municipal clients and projects. He traces his immense life success to a combination of opportunities.

“The Boys Club gave us an opportunity to become socialized, to be on our own and make decisions for which we were responsible. The era in which I came of age afforded black students new opportunities that the older generation had been denied; people like Willie and myself were fully prepared to take advantage of these opportunities.”

He says, “We learned at the Club, from our parents and from each other that when you make up your mind to achieve something, you can do it.”
CHAPTER 22

Additional Alumni Standouts
CLARENCE BROWN, San Diego High School Class of 1951, was the first black student to serve as editor of the school newspaper, The Russ. After graduating from San Diego State University with a degree in journalism and receiving a commission to serve in the U.S. Army, Brown became a prominent attorney.

BENNY HOLLMAN spent a lot of time at the Boys Club and even more time perfecting his saxophone talents. While at San Diego High School, he formed an R&B band and also played professionally. Later, his Benny Hollman Orchestra performed throughout San Diego, including a long-running engagement at La Costa Resort & Spa. In 1978, the Benny Hollman Big Band became the official San Diego Chargers’ band. Hollman also was a musical director and arranger for recording artist Frankie Laine. He initiated elementary school music programs and quietly helped his community until his death in December 2015.

After being inspired in 1949 by Memorial Junior High School’s first African-American instructor, vocal music teacher Helen Nelson, DANIEL JACKSON determined to become a musician. Upon graduating from San Diego High School in 1955, he joined the Air Force and played in the military band. After his discharge, Jackson forged a career as a be-bop jazz saxophonist who performed at local hot spots and played with many of the greats of his time, including Ray Charles.

JOHN LOCKWOOD became a respected public servant at the City of San Diego. Starting as a mail room messenger making $142 per month in 1949, the year he graduated from San Diego High School, Lockwood rose to the position of City Manager in 1986, overseeing a $1.2-billion budget and 9,000 employees.

ERNEST MARUGG began his career as an officer with the San Diego Police Department, then became an investigator with the San Diego District Attorney’s Office. After earning his Juris Doctorate in 1975, he served as Deputy DA, then operated a successful law firm for 20 years. He returned to his DA position in 2000, retiring in 2010. In accordance with his wishes, when Marugg died in 2013, his family requested donations to the Oakes Club.
ROBERT OSBY was a distance runner at San Diego High School and a man who ran the distance and burst through barriers in his career. He joined the San Diego Fire Department at age 23, moved up through the ranks, but despite scoring first on all exams, was twice passed over for Fire Chief. Undeterred, Osby moved north, serving as Fire Chief in Inglewood for six years and in San Jose for seven years. Finally, in 1992, his hometown courted him back, naming him San Diego’s first African-American Fire Chief. Chief Osby served in San Diego until 2002, when he became the first African-American Fire Chief in Oceanside. Upon his retirement in 2005, then-Oceanside City Councilman Rocky Chavez praised Chief Osby’s efforts to diversify the department by adding more minority and female employees. Following in his father’s barrier-breaking footsteps, Robert’s son Daryl Osby recently became the first African-American Fire Chief of the Los Angeles County Fire Department.

CARLOS RAMIREZ was one of the first Mexican-Americans in the country to win several midget auto racing honors. He drove for San Diego’s famous Bean Bandits, who raced on the Paradise Mesa Drag Strip. Starting out as a mainly Latino group, the Bean Bandits expanded to embrace drivers of all ethnicities, including Italians, Japanese, Lebanese, Filipinos and African-Americans. Between 1951-1954, the Bean Bandits won nearly 400 trophies, including the first National Hot Rod Championship. In honor of her deceased brother, Carlos’ sister, Nonie Beach, is a member of the Oakes Alumni Association.

RICHARD SALDIVAR, a fifth-generation San Diegan whose grandfather and uncle served on the San Diego Police Department, joined the department in 1960 and became one of the most decorated cops on the force. In 1967, he advanced his law enforcement career by joining the Santa Clara County Sheriff’s Department, where he made Sergeant in two years, then Lieutenant, and ultimately Captain. After 24 fulfilling years in Santa Clara, Captain Saldivar retired, leaving what was widely heralded by his peers as a legacy of leading by example.
In 1942, **Junior Washington** was so anxious for the Boys Club to open that he was pictured in the paper during construction sitting with two other boys on the cupola awaiting installation. He became an FBI agent and was listed in *Who’s Who in America*. Getting his start as a San Diego policeman, Washington teamed with Johnnie Lee Williams as they became San Diego’s first two African-Americans patrolling together. Among his many feats of bravery, Washington once risked his life by unjamming the door of a car engulfed in flames and pulling out the man to safety.

Track and field and basketball beckoned, but **Harry West** loved football. His stellar sports prowess, nurtured in the mid-1940s at the Boys Club, won him a football scholarship to the University of California Berkeley, where his running back feats were legendary. After earning his BA and two Master’s degrees at San Diego State University, West became a lifelong coach, initially at Berkeley. In 1964, he was named Head Coach and Athletic Director at San Diego City College, where he retired as Associate Dean in 1991 and then managed a summer sports program serving disadvantaged youth.

**Johnnie Lee Williams** was an early proponent of community policing. As a 26-year police officer with the San Diego Sheriff’s Department, and one of the first African-Americans in his position, he was tough on crime and criminals, but always fair to all. He was a beloved cop to folks on his beat, known for providing youth with positive guidance and supervision. Even murder suspects surrendered to Detective Williams because they trusted him. He once confided, “I have had people come to my home to give themselves up and if I was not at home, they would wait in their car for me to return.”
RAFINO (JUNIOR) YAPTANGCO enjoyed a 27-year career with the San Diego Police Department. In 1965, when the Beatles performed for a wild crowd at Balboa Stadium, some fans jumped the fence and ran toward the stage as police officers scrambled to catch them. Later, Police Chief Ray Hoobler quipped, “Officer Rafino Yaptangco made one of the finest open field tackles I’ve ever seen.” Yaptangco’s duties included protecting VIP visitors such as then-California Governor (and future President) Ronald Reagan. He relates, “The Governor called me Junior. He was a great man. When I told him that a cop who’d just died had been a huge fan, he had us stop the car at a pay phone so he could call the man’s widow.” After retiring as a Criminal Investigations Detective in 1989, Yaptangco served as Director of Security for SeaWorld for 20 years.
Part Four:
Honoring Our Roots
1953-2016
CHAPTER 23

We’re Seeing Stars
Boys Club Benefit
Cast-Studded

Dennis Day Heads Spectacular Unit From Radio, Films

"The 21st Hour," slated for Monday night at Park Bowl, Balboa Park, led by Dennis Day, is by all accounts, destined to be "the performance of the year." But the playing for place in Hollywood luncheon, sponsored by club performers, for which Day is representing with his own group, was not one of the Starlight Club of Club Bowls, and he thinks it should be the event of the year.

Day guests in the West during the war-including the Evening Call. When the performance of the Park Bowl show was delayed, Day arrived early for the singing. Soon after he had sung "I'll Be Right Here Waiting," he started his program, "The Life of a Sailor"-Mr. Day in support of his program.

Review of Day

All his musical, vocal, instrumental and dramatic abilities were displayed in the program that was presented by Mr. Day as part of the program.

"The best," he commented, "as is the case, the musical and vocal programs for the 1600 members of the Boys Club, will be on the "San Diego Boys' Club," with choruses from the program will be presented on the program, the program will be presented on the program.

Wanda Hendricks, author of the "Lena and the Boys' Club," is included in the program, the program will be presented on the program.

Bobby Allen

... "There ain't no place now for me kids to practice."
In the 1930s, the stars began quietly to align for the creation of the Boys Club of San Diego. In the 1940s, as the facility opened and grew, the stars continued to shine on the Club and its members, who were coming of age and becoming productive adults.

Starting in the late 1940s, Hollywood stars came out to perform in high-profile shows of support. Proceeds benefited the construction of the much-anticipated gym and pool; provision of on-site healthcare programs; and creation of new Clubs that would join the flock.

Staunch fundraising support has not only been welcomed but greatly needed, as financial challenges have been an ever-present fact of Boys (& Girls) Club life. Fortuitously, champions – both individuals and organizations – have always come forward at critical times to keep BGCGSD's increasing number of doors open.

As the Oakes Club's first decade transitioned into its second, star-studded fundraisers caught the attention of the media and kept the Club in the forefront of people's minds and on their charitable donation lists. A kickoff event held in the Ford Bowl (later renamed Starlight Bowl) at Balboa Park on May 14, 1948 was billed as “the performance of the year.” That it was! Headlined by handsome singing star Dennis Day, the “It” guy of his time and a patriot who saw active combat duty during World War II, the revue also featured well-known comedians, sultry songstresses and popular radio stars.

Not only was the “throng delighted by [the] benefit show,” reported the papers, but this “great show for a great cause put more than $40,000 into the S.D. Boys Club exchequer.”

In advance of the show, Boys Club members performed skits for the Lions Club and Rotary. Young Bobby Allen told audiences: “There ain't no place now for us kids to practice. Why can't we have a gym; so us kids can learn to play basketball and stuff? The big fellahs get a chance to play in other gyms sometimes, but they won't let us go.” Seeing Club kids perform to such dramatic effect, audience members opened their hearts and wallets.

**MOVIE PREMIERES BENEFIT CLUB**

March 12, 1950 marked an unprecedented high when the year's most anticipated movie, “Cheaper by the Dozen,” starring Clifton Webb and Myrna Loy, presented its national premiere at San Diego's Fox Theatre as a Boys Club benefit. The event put San Diego – and the unpretentious Club – on the map!

Several thousand people lined the curb to glimpse the stars, who mingled with “special guests” at an exclusive dinner at the elite San Diego Club. Ironically, the San Diego Club excluded minorities, but the premiere benefited all Boys Club of San Diego members.

As the years went on, so did the benefit shows. Stars of the day making Ford Bowl appearances included Mickey Rooney, Nanette Fabray, Frank Capra and many more. Popular actor Victor Mature once delayed his departure for a South Dakota
THOUSANDS SEEK GLIMPSE OF FILM PERSONALITIES HERE FOR PREMIERE

A crowd of several thousands lined the curbs in blocks adjacent to the Fox Theater last night for a glimpse of the stars of "Cheaper by the Dozen," which had its premiere there as a benefit for the San Diego Boys Club. The theater was practically filled more than an hour before arrival of the stars and special guests after a dinner at the San Diego Club.
movie set so he could attend a world premiere of “The Robe” at the Fox to honor his commitment to the Club.

After the Club’s gym and pool were completed in the early 1950s, fundraisers supported the establishment of a dental and physical examination room. The objective, explained Director Chet Van Dusen, was to make sure that “each of the 1,600 lads that carry membership cards get a medical and dental checkup every year.”

The high-profile events, along with ongoing paper drives conducted by the members, enabled the Club to hire supervisory staff and swimming instructors. By helping to raise money for their Club, the members saw themselves not as charity cases, but as strong individuals working together to better their options in life.


Fifty years hence, when race no longer precluded involvement in pro sports, San Diego Padres right fielder Dave Winfield stepped up to the plate for Oakes kids by presenting a baseball clinic for 100 girls and boys. After demonstrating how to throw, field and hit, the Hall of Famer treated them to a Padres game.

The Padres-BGCGSD connection continues today. As a 2016 All-Star Legacy project, the San Diego Padres Foundation and Major League Baseball transformed an old field and parking lot at the Conrad Prebys Escondido Branch into a classy baseball diamond.

THE SHOWS MUST GO ON — AND THEY DO!

From 1963-2013, BGCGSD presented an annual Golden Achievement Awards Dinner (GAAD) to honor a local hero for making a positive contribution to the community and helping young people. For years, this event was the organization’s top fundraiser. Popular comedians of the era such as Joe E. Brown, Foster Brooks, Flip Wilson and Jim Backus headlined the events.

The annual honorees were as first-rate as the entertainment. They included Theodore Geisel (Dr. Seuss), Jonas Salk, MD (developer of the polio vaccine) and Pete Wilson (former California Governor). Also recognized for his efforts was Oakes Club’s own Honorable Earl Gilliam, who received the award in 1981.

Beginning in 2014 as a vehicle to take fundraising to the next level, BGCGSD evolved GAAD into a full-featured Evening of Changing Lives. The inaugural Evening got the event off on a high note with Boys & Girls Clubs alumnus Kool & the Gang performing for a packed crowd and BGCA Alumni Hall of Fame TV star Courtney B. Vance serving as emcee. This first event set the bar by raising over $1 million and achieving instant fame throughout San Diego County as the gala of galas.

Subsequent Evenings of Changing Lives have featured Brian Wilson of the beloved Beach Boys and Don Felder of the iconic Eagles. The event continues to be the organization’s largest fundraiser each year, thanks to major sponsors and partners as well as the immense generosity of guests.
Before performing at the 2014 Evening of Changing Lives, Kool and the Gang visited the Teen Center at the Ron Roberts Branch in Linda Vista, where they were awed by the kids’ robotics acumen.

Boys & Girls Clubs of America Alumni Hall of Fame TV star Courtney B. Vance addresses the crowd at the 2014 Evening of Changing Lives.
CHAPTER 24

Moving On Up
CAREER CLUB MAN: JOE JACOBS

Joe Jacobs boasts the most BGCGSD longevity: 32 years. After serving in the U.S. Navy from 1943-1946, Jacobs was living in Toledo, Ohio in the early 1950s when a mutual friend mentioned him to a possible employer.

The friend, Chuck Conley, ran the National City Club, recalls Jacobs’ widow, Betty Jacobs. She says, “Chuck told the Oakes Club’s Executive Director, Chet Van Dusen, that he had a friend looking to come out to California. That’s how Joe got the job.”

Starting as Oakes’ Athletic Director in 1952, Joe Jacobs had to fill some pretty big shoes; his predecessor, Augie Escamilla, was idolized by the kids. The boys soon came to see Jacobs as a caring role model, and Club officials viewed him as a competent leader.

He was appointed Branch Director in 1954, moving in 1960 to the new Clairemont Club. In 1964, he was promoted to Executive Director of the three-facility Boys Clubs of San Diego: Oakes, Linda Vista and Clairemont.

Among his accomplishments, Jacobs spearheaded a program that helped children with developmental disabilities. The Skill Training and Readiness of Educable Slow Students (STRESS) program paired Club boys with buddies to participate in activities. The pairing was said to increase the disabled children’s interest span and must have done wonders for Club kids in terms of developing patience and empathy. In 1965, future President Richard Nixon presented the “Honor Award for Program Excellence” to Jacobs for the Club’s “nationally outstanding, highly valuable and creative” contributions.

After retiring in 1984, Jacobs continued serving his community, promoting establishment of the USS Midway Museum in San Diego. He died in 2013.

Betty Jacobs says, “Joe loved the Boys Clubs. He cherished the letters he received from youth he had helped over the years. In the early days, I volunteered at Oakes one day a week. I could understand what he liked about the Club and its members. And I could understand what they liked about Joe.”
A program of the Boys' Clubs of San Diego to help mentally retarded boys has been honored by the 650-member national Boys' Club organization.

Joseph C. Jacobs, executive director of the local group, accepted the award at the national meeting in Atlantic City. Jacobs was hailed for the group's growth from two boys in a room to 650 members and one full-time and one part-time worker. Jacobs was named national outstanding youth worker for the second consecutive year.

Former Vice President Richard M. Nixon, left, presents award to Joseph C. Jacobs, executive director of Boys' Clubs of San Diego, for winning national honor. Nixon is national board chairman.
Arthur and Gertrude Anderson, the original Oakes Club’s primary benefactors, died in the early 1950s. Funds from their trust, along with donations from civic leaders and proceeds from fundraisers, supported the establishment of the Linda Vista Boys Club in 1955 and Clairemont Boys Club in 1961. National City had opened a Boys Club in 1948, which in 2009 would become part of the current organization.

Throughout the years, Clubs that would join BGCGSD sprouted up throughout inland San Diego County; stretching from a few miles north of the U.S. border north to Valley Center and east to Borrego Springs. Girls became part of the mix in 1981 when Escondido Boys Club merged with Escondido Girls Club to form Boys & Girls Club of Escondido. In 1988, Boys Clubs of San Diego officially changed its name to Boys & Girls Clubs of San Diego.

Longtime BGCGSD employees recall, “Our Clubs were ahead of the curve. Serving girls was a very heated discussion topic at national conferences. Many Clubs throughout the country did not want to do so. The national organization did not change its name to Boys & Girls Clubs of America until 1990.”

Through a series of additional new branches and mergers, Boys & Girls Clubs United was formed in 2000 with the unification of Boys & Girls Clubs in Borrego Springs, Escondido, Poway, Ramona and Valley Center. This entity merged with Boys & Girls Clubs of San Diego in 2002 to become Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater San Diego.
CHAPTER 25

Changing with the Times
Did you know that the BOYS' CLUB MOVEMENT was founded in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1860 by a group of ladies who recognized the need for a non-sectarian organization providing leadership and guidance after-school activities for less privileged youngsters? The Club they founded, "The Dashaway Boys' Club," was the forerunner of today's nationwide association of more than 375 Boy's Clubs.

Did you know that The National organization, BOYS' CLUBS OF AMERICA, is

Standing from left to right: William E. Moore, Jim Hopkins, William R. McCrady, Henry H. Rollins, Herbert R. Hunter.

Seated from left to right: Lorenzo Anderson, Charles L. Matthews, Walter L. McDonald, Peter J. Mckinns making the presentation of the $100.00 check to Harold I. Jackson, branch director of the William J. Oakes branch of the Boys' Club.

"A MAN IS NOT SO TALL UNTIL HE HAS STOOPED TO HELP A BOY".

All of the members of the Royal Eagles Social and Charity Club are feeling extremely tall today, and rightly so. After a joint meeting with the Mothers' Club of Boys' Club, William J. Oakes Branch, on September 4, the Royal Eagles made plans to contribute $100.00, after learning of the many ways in which the Boys' Club is serving our youths and promoting wholesome activities, which in turn encourages "Juvenile Decency".

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AGAINST THE GRAIN
As Bob Dylan first sang in 1964, “The Times They Are a Changin’ ” and the San Diego Boys Clubs certainly changed with the times. In the early 1960s, as noted by Karen Huff, Black Historical Society of San Diego, “82 percent of all blacks in San Diego lived in Logan Heights … clearly the new black community by that time. A significant white flight of the area … made this migratory process relatively easy for African-Americans as well as Hispanics.”

Reflecting the change in neighborhood composition, in 1963 Harold (Hal) Jackson became the first black Director of the Oakes Club. A newspaper article showing Jackson introducing new member Marty Estrada to the Club’s many programs indicates that the organization continued to serve children of diverse ethnicities.

Amazingly, one thing that had not changed since the Club’s 1942 inception were annual membership dues: still just one dollar! As was true since the beginning, a predominant characteristic shared among members was poverty – in both a monetary and recreational sense. A newspaper article explained, “At the Boys Club, youngsters find companionship and friends, safe from the physical and moral dangers of the streets.”

Club support widened during the sixties. The African-American Royal Eagles Social and Charity Club, at the time the oldest men’s club in San Diego, donated money and subsidized memberships. A Mothers’ Club composed primarily of black women conducted rummage sales and sponsored teen dances, complete with watusi and twist contests. A Boys Club Auxiliary composed primarily of white women assisted the three existing Clubs: Oakes, Linda Vista and Clairemont.

In 1965, when President Emeritus George Scott received the Golden Man and Boy Award for his efforts in establishing the Oakes branch and his longtime leadership and support, a local paper reflected upon the Club’s value to youth and the community over the past 23 years.

The article noted, “Since 1942, thousands upon thousands of boys have had a place to go for wholesome activity … to meet their chums, or just hang around, or work on their hobbies or play. The Club directs boys onto paths of good behavior and achievement. The average boy would rather be good and behave himself than not, but in some cases he needs the help of understanding adults.”

Proving that point, in 1965 four recent alumni participated in President Lyndon Johnson’s Youth Opportunity Campaign, which provided summer work and training opportunities to aspirational, at-risk youth. Portrayed as leaders with many talents and goals, the young men were praised for “doing all work assigned to them with genuine enthusiasm. They are already proving a real asset to the organization.”

Over the next decades, Club articles and photos reflect the times in memorable fashion. As challenges continued, champions from near and far stepped up to help, also in memorable fashion.

In 1989, 600 employees of General Electric’s Plastics Division from around the world took time out from their global convention to conduct an amazing, one-
Mrs. La Vada A. Newton of 442 South 35th Street, San Diego, has been installed as the President of the Boys' Club of San Diego, Wm J. Oakes Building, MOTHERS' CLUB for 1962.

Mrs. Newton is a long time resident of the Southeast District and of San Diego. She is a mother of two; a son and a daughter and she is a Notary Public, registered by the State of California. She has attended San Diego State College and is still actively engaged in continuing her education. Mrs. Newton is a member of the Logan Temple A.M.E. Church and is very active and dedicated to the work of the church. She resides with her husband, Herbert E. Newton of the Post Office Department, and her two children, Norma and Kenneth.

Serving on Mrs. Newton's cabinet will be Mrs. Sybil McPhatter, Vice-President; employed by the city of San Diego, Mrs. Barbara J. Smith, Secretary; Housewife and Mother; Mrs. Willie B. Fraxier, Treasurer; Housewife and Mother.

Mrs. Newton and her officers will be actively engaged in helping to formulate and activities and "affairs" by which the Boys' Club endeavors to achieve the aims
Boys Clubs Name

Scott Golden Man

George A. Scott, a founder of Boys Clubs of San Diego, Inc., received the club's annual Golden Man and Boy Award last night as part of the observance of National Boys Club Week.

Scott was given the honor posthumously in recognition of his fine work in helping boys in the San Diego area during the years of the club's existence.

Scott served as its president in 1927, 1931, 1933 and 1935. He was elected to the National Board of Directors of Boys Clubs in 1935 and still is a member.

The Gold Medal Award, instituted last year, is given to a boy who has made a significant contribution to Boys Clubs.

The award was given to Robert T. Reed, 18, a junior at El Camino High School. Reed is a member of the Boys Club auxiliary and has donated his time and talent to the club.

He was instrumental in raising funds for the club's annual picnic and has been a leader in the club's activities.

Scott served as its president from 1919 to 1935 and was elected to the National Board of Directors of Boys Clubs in 1935 and still is a member.

Scott died in 1940, but his contributions to the Boys Club are still remembered.

The Gold Medal Award, instituted last year, is given to a boy who has made a significant contribution to Boys Clubs.

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day overhaul of the Oakes Club, which was acknowledged to be in sore need of a renovation. And what a renovation it was!

Working in teams, G.E. volunteers repainted the exterior and interior, created a playground, landscaped the playing fields, installed an underground sprinkler system, laid new carpet and replaced 1,100 windowpanes. In addition to donating their efforts, they paid for the materials and equipment. Gone were the graffiti and broken windows marring the building. In their place was a beautiful facility, inside and out, that engendered pride in Club members, who promised “to keep it [nice] the way it is.”

A CONTINUAL CHALLENGE: KEEPING THE DOORS OPEN

Thanks to large-scale efforts such as G.E.’s “extreme renovation” and smaller projects conducted by others in the community, the Oakes Club was spruced up from time to time. Nevertheless, money was always an issue.

In early years, as the sole Club in San Diego County, Oakes received major funding from groups such as the Community Chest. Later, proceeds from United Way, the successor of Community Chest, benefited Clubs throughout the nation, including the organization in San Diego. But when United Way withdrew the majority of its funding in 1997, San Diego Clubs were forced to cut back significantly on staff, and thus on programs and services.

While the City of San Diego provided pass-through funding to renovate the building, its policies impinged directly upon the Oakes Branch. Over the years, the City, which continued to lease the 2930 Marcy Avenue property to BGCGSD, began taking back key portions to create a public playground and skate park.

At one point, City officials caused great consternation among BGCGSD stakeholders when they declined to renew the Oakes Club’s lease while they pondered whether to turn this historic site of changing lives into a library. Fortunately, they decided to locate the library at nearby Logan Elementary School, and so renewed the lease. The City-Club lease agreement is in effect today.

In addition to individual branch challenges, BGCGSD faced economic hardship, over and over again. Every time the national and local economy plummeted, so did funding.

AN AUDACIOUS STRATEGY: THE SURGE

In 2009, the country’s struggling economy had a severe effect on donations from individuals and foundations. To remedy a $250,000 shortfall in BGCGSD’s annual operating budget, the Board’s Executive Committee recognized that without an influx of cash, dire consequences would result. It was forced to consider draconian options, including closing sites and eliminating vital programs.

But just as Founder William J. Oakes and his Boys Club of San Diego team of civic leaders persevered in the face of economic obstacles to establish the first Clubhouse
Bringing good things to life

Visiting General Electric workers hoist flag at the William J. Oakes branch of the Boys and Girls Club of San Diego. They gave the Logan Heights clubhouse a face lift yesterday. See story on B-1.
in 1942, the Executive Committee in 2009 held steadfast to the organization's original intent of providing children with a safe, enriching home-away-from-home and a path toward achievement.

The Committee determined that in these challenging times with the needs of members greater than ever, the organization should be expanding, not contracting its services. In an intrepid move that Oakes would have admired, the Executive Committee directed management to prepare a plan to surge.

The aggressive surge was funded by a multi-year grant from the Club's Foundation. Thus, while many other nonprofits scaled back services and laid off staff, BGCGSD expanded services, upgraded programs and training, and added additional staff to raise funds critical to fulfilling the Club's mission.

The surge was a great success. The positive momentum has continued. Today, the Club serves more children than ever, its facilities are well-maintained and programs are thriving.
CHAPTER 26

Keeping the Legacy Alive
Operating a successful Boys & Girls Club requires an ensemble effort. There are no superstars. Here are some of the many people who keep the legacy alive and thriving.

**BGCGSD BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Active. Involved. Hands-on. Enthusiastic. Dedicated. Passionate. Being a member of BGCGSD’s Board of Directors means much more than having one’s name on the Club letterhead or website.

Over the organization’s 75 years of existence, hundreds of caring men and women have volunteered their time, talent and treasure to serve on the Board. They have worked tirelessly to govern BGCGSD, serve as a champion for young people and raise funds to support and grow the organization. Without these dedicated individuals, Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater San Diego would not exist today.

Among its myriad accomplishments, the Board has conducted capital campaigns to raise funds to build new clubhouses, expand and renovate existing clubhouses and add sought-after, kid-friendly features such as soccer arenas, swimming pools and skate board parks. It presents fundraisers throughout the year, advocates for youth with local, regional and national agencies, and, importantly, raises funds to support the operating budget.

With an annual BGCGSD budget of more than $9 million, the Board personally donates and directly solicits more than $1 million of that total. At the Oakes branch alone, over 71% of the current $355,000 annual operating budget emanates from the Board’s and staff’s multifaceted efforts.

Every family whose child walks through the door of a BGCGSD branch owes much to the robust efforts of a tenacious Board of Directors. Here are profiles of three key members.

**PORTRAITS OF INVOLVEMENT**

**DAN WEBER**

As the eldest of four children raised by a single mother, Dan Weber, now a principal in the Law Offices of Goria, Weber and Jarvis, understands the challenges working parents face as well as the dangers that can tempt latch-key children with too much time on their hands and nothing productive to do after school. But as a newly minted attorney in San Diego in the mid-1970s, Weber’s introduction to Boys Clubs came out of the blue via the famed Thunderboat Races on Mission Bay. This heart-pounding competition guided Weber to his heart’s calling as a premiere fundraiser for Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater San Diego.

*Boys Clubs were not on my radar. I had only been to a Club once, in Phoenix. Powerboat racing was definitely on my radar. I met the event’s chairman, Bob*
Payne, who observed my interest and asked me to be on the Thunderboat committee in 1977. I discovered that the benefitting charity was Boys Clubs of San Diego, in which Bob also was active. In 1978, he suggested I join the Board of Trustees for the organization comprising the Oakes, Linda Vista, Clairemont and Encanto Clubs. I got involved and here I am, 38 years later, still very active.

I was able to identify with the kids being served. My continuing focus has been on ensuring that children, especially in the most desperate communities, are looked after. I want kids to have a safe place to go where they have positive adult interactions, become exposed to things like arts and computers, and most of all, that each boy and girl is given a good opportunity to make something of their life. Taking advantage of the opportunity is up to them, but providing it is something we can do.

I see my role as the person who raises funds. In the early 1980s, I chaired the Golden Achievement Award Dinner (GAAD) for two years. The events garnered the highest attendance of their time; over 1,000 at each black-tie, men-only, cigar-smoking event. The first was unforgettable. Most guests were unfamiliar with the antics of comedian Foster Brooks, who played a drunk to perfection. After being introduced as the “head of the Boys Club of America,” he stumbled upon stage and spoke incoherently, causing reactions in the audience that were as hysterical to watch as his bawdy performance.

Throughout the years, I have chaired planned giving committees in their various iterations. In 2015, I was BGCGSD Board Chair and I am now Vice Chair of the $10 million Great Futures Capital Campaign. We intend to maximize utilization of our facilities and fund vehicles to transport children from school to Club in both urban and suburban settings.

By being one of the guys who raise funds for the organization's operations, I can help BGCGSD get disadvantaged youth on the proper track. Some kids are going to make it no matter what, due to their strong character. But most need to learn how to be involved, engaged, responsible and goal-oriented. In other words, good citizens. That’s the value of our Board to the kids, and to the community.

JAMES (JIM) OLIVER

A fortuitous conversation with a duck aficionado steered Jim Oliver to the Board of what in 1988 was the four-facility Boys Club of San Diego. His passion for the Club's mission and members led him to take leadership roles on what evolved into the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater San Diego (BGCGSD) Board and to maintain an extremely active and proactive stance in propelling the organization forward.

Oliver’s involvement is reminiscent of the 1940s when Naval officers visited the Oakes Branch and took Club members to the ships for holiday tours, dinners and gift-giving. Currently Senior Vice President and Financial Advisor at Morgan Stanley
Wealth Management in San Diego, Oliver believes that giving his time and money to the Club has in turn given him a rewarding sense of fulfillment.

My father brought me up to live by these words: “If you have extra money, give some of it back to the community. If you have extra time, give some of that back to the community.”

During my 20 years with the U.S. Navy, I could not follow that precept as we were frequently on the move. When I retired in 1987 to San Diego, where I’d once been stationed, I joined just about every nonprofit in which I had even the most remote interest. As I’m an avid bird hunter and conservationist, one of these organizations was Ducks Unlimited. At one meeting, a fellow member said, “Jim, you should meet my buddies at the Boys Club.”

I thought, “What the heck is a Boys Club?” But when we toured the Club, it hit me right between the eyes. I’ve always wanted to help disadvantaged people and here was my opportunity! I resigned from all the other nonprofits and joined the Boys Club Board.

When the national and local economy plunged at certain times, putting the BGCGSD in dire straits, I offered my financial expertise to weather the storm and keep us operating. I strongly encouraged Board members to step up to the plate. Knowing that the best way to ask people for money is to first give yourself, I set an example for others to follow.

I’ve been a busily and happily involved Board member. In the mid-1990s, I served as Board Chair. I’ve chaired the Board Development Committee, been active on the BGCGSD Foundation and served on several committees, including the current Great Futures Capital Campaign. I also enjoy giving branch tours to prospective Board members.

It’s not the money, but the results of the money that impress me. We give kids who have every reason to fail an opportunity not to fail. One recent success story is never far from my mind.

I live a couple miles from the Linda Vista Branch. At Halloween, we get a ton of neighborhood kids trick-or-treating at our condo complex. I always remembered one boy, who escorted a bunch of younger children in their cute costumes to keep them safe. I later learned that a close male relative had died a violent death; another was in prison. Despite all odds, this youth, due in part, I’m certain, to attending the Linda Vista Club, did not go down that destructive path. As a senior, he was named Linda Vista’s Youth of the Year. I was at the ceremony and applauded him.

A few years later, in my office building, who should I see getting into the elevator on the floor housing prestigious law firms but this same boy, now an adult. I said hello to the professionally dressed young man, reminded him who I was and asked him how he came to be on that floor, in this building.

He proudly proclaimed, “I work here.”

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KEEPING THE LEGACY ALIVE
Founding Oakes Alumni Association members credit Tom Hazard, a longtime stakeholder and recipient of the Club's 1991 Golden Achievement Award, for initiating the effort that enabled them to remedy what they describe as severe problems with the facility.

Tom Hazard’s Club roots run deep. As a youngster, this native San Diegan played basketball at the Linda Vista Boys Club. He joined the Oakes Board in the 1980s. In 1996, the Director of the five-facility Boys Clubs of San Diego (Oakes, Linda Vista, Clairemont, Encanto and now-defunct City Heights) abruptly resigned. Tom Hazard applied for the position. The Board received 75 resumes and whittled the list to four highly qualified applicants. Just as Chet Van Dusen transitioned from Oakes Board Member to Executive Director in 1942, 54 years later, Tom was the unanimous choice. He served from 1996-2001, then rejoined the BGCGSD Board, on which he now serves as an honorary member.

In the 1990s, the Oakes Clubhouse had lots of potential but lots of problems. Area gangs and the building's age and unmet maintenance needs made it an under-utilized treasure. I obtained major financial supporters to get us going on repairs and encouraged former members to invest in their old Club and community. One of our first projects was renovating the floor in the games room.

I recommended that the alumni form a nonprofit. Thus was born the William J. Oakes Boys & Girls Club Alumni Association in 1999. The group presented a dinner honoring former Athletic Director Augie Escamilla for his monumental impact upon youth. When the 350 attendees saw the Club’s deterioration, many offered to help.

The Association began raising money and tackling repairs, doing much of the work themselves. Members also pursued their goal to obtain historical designation from the City of San Diego to honor their past and save their Club.

As the community changed, so did the Oakes Branch. A partnership with Head Start was developed to enable preschoolers to benefit from the Club. In 2003, a technology center was added to meet the growing interests in computers. In 2008, a soccer arena was built to serve an expanding Hispanic population.

Today, with the significant support of BGCGSD’s Board, the meaningful contributions of the Alumni Association, good leadership and many activities for kids to engage in, membership is up. The Oakes Club looks 100% better than before. It has been transformed from an under-utilized into a fully-utilized treasure.
Decades after William J. Oakes and his team went against the grain of a segregated society to establish a Boys Club that became a beacon of convivial integration, Club alumni followed suit to ensure that their beloved Club would shine brightly as a historically significant living landmark. In 1999, 12 predominately African-American early Club members established a nonprofit Alumni Association. The stated goal: “To keep the Club active and alive like it was for the boys and girls prior, today and in the future.”

Vice President A.C. Mills believes, “The Oakes Club is important not only to all the children who have come through the doors, but to the very fabric of our Logan Heights neighborhood and all of San Diego. Had our little Club not been the first in the county, the others might not have followed.”

Prominent Club alumni who were pioneers in their chosen field such as iconic athlete Charlie Powell and Judge Napoleon Jones returned to the Club that had nurtured them to help build bright futures for a new generation of members. As time went on, other supporters, including Jack Henn and James Justus, eagerly joined the effort.

**JACK HENN**

Jack Henn was born in 1941 and grew up in Mission Hills, attending San Diego High School. As a teen, he and his buddies played pickup basketball at the Oakes Club. Among his friends was future NBA player Arthur (Hambone) Williams. Henn was a member of the 1968 U.S. Olympic volleyball team. He served as head of Balboa Park’s Municipal Athletics Gymnasium for the San Diego Recreation Department from 1966-1974, and coached men’s volleyball at San Diego State University from 1966-1974 and 1985-2001.

*Like other guys who played at the Boys Club, I participated in more than one sport: basketball and baseball. And then, for me, there was volleyball. Over the years, I followed Arthur’s basketball career and we stayed in touch. Arthur was one of the founding members of the Alumni Association. Shortly after it was established in 1999, I was asked to join and was happy to do so.*

*I believe the history of the Club and contributions of the Club's alumni speak for themselves. Individuals who have made enduring contributions to their community and to mankind learned many of their values from selfless staff members who mentored them at the Club through their formative years.*
KEEPING THE LEGACY ALIVE
AGAINST THE GRAIN

“From Oakes We Receive-To Oakes We Give”
Alumni Association Of The William J. Oakes
Boys & Girls Club
“Together We Can Make A Difference”
In the early Association days, I was part of a group that put on golf tournaments to raise money. Club alumnus Leonard Arevalo and I played golf together. It was Leonard who had the idea for the golf fundraisers. Later, Deputy District Attorney Ernie Marugg took the reins.

Now, I am in charge of the annual Oakes awards ceremony. I procure essentials like food and trophies, and the Oakes employees do a great job of decorating. It’s a huge deal for the children and their families. Close to 200 people attended our Spring 2016 event!

It’s great to still be friends with old buddies, and to connect with the guys at our meetings. We all like to be around the kids. It energizes us.

JAMES JUSTUS

The principle of serving others resides deep within James Justus’ DNA. Growing up in Chicago in the early 1950s, Justus attended a Boys Club adjacent to the Fillmore police station on the city’s west side. His first foray into volunteering came in the late 1960s where, armed with a degree in Industrial Arts from Long Beach State University, he joined the Peace Corps, teaching auto mechanics and drafting in Jamaica. Settling in San Diego, Justus became a substitute teacher who worked on people’s cars on the side. When a neighbor suggested, “Why don’t you open your own shop?” he did, in 1971. Today, James Automotive Services is located on Imperial Avenue in Sherman Heights.

I became involved with the Oakes Club in the early 1980s, accompanying my friends John Bettencourt and Lyle Larosh to the annual banquet, then held at the Town & Country Hotel. I got to know then-Oakes Director Art Curry. I told Art I’d like to get more involved. He suggested we establish a Board of Directors to support the branch, so we formed an organization, with Lyle as President and John, myself and others as members. That’s when we started the annual Pancake Breakfast fundraiser.

As the primary Pancake Breakfast organizer, I’ve devoted a great deal of time over the years to soliciting sponsors for the event and for the annual soap box derby races in Encanto and Sherman Heights. To me, it’s time well spent. I believe it’s good for business people to give back to the community that allows them to make a living.

The original Oakes Board disbanded in the early 1990s. Later that decade, when Tom Hazard approached me about becoming a member of the incipient Alumni Association, I agreed.

The Club is a worthy cause. A lot of kids are at risk of making bad decisions. Getting involved in the Club helps them see things in a different perspective. It’s a gang-free, drug-free, positive and safe environment.

KEEPING THE LEGACY ALIVE
While the building and its contents are important, nothing has a greater impact on changing lives than the relationship between a caring adult and a child.

Beginning with Chet Van Dusen, Augie Escamilla, Robert Bagley and Mabel Waring, hundreds of Club staff have served the youth of Logan Heights at the Oakes Club. Some have been high-profile; directly interacting with children at the control counter, in a classroom, the gymnasium, the natatorium or on a bus. Others have been unsung heroes; working behind the scenes to hire and train staff, manage volunteers, raise funds, pay bills or maintain facilities. Their cumulative impact has been immeasurable.
Mabel Waring, staff member, signs up Eddie Logan as a new member. Formal induction rites will follow.

(Union Staff Photos by Charles Aqua Viva)
Part Five:
Coming Full Circle
What will the “new kids on the 40 Acres block” at 2930 Marcy Avenue accomplish in their lifetimes? Will they become a judicial paragon like Earl Gilliam? A famous musician like Benny Hollman? A barrier-breaker like John Ritchey? A good parent and productive member of society like so many of the boys and girls who preceded them?

Early Boys Club of San Diego alumni say, “We are eager to watch today’s members of the William J. Oakes Branch of Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater San Diego build their futures and attain their goals.”
On April 30, 2012, BGCGSD Board members, Oakes Alumni Association members, Club management and staff, Boys & Girls Clubs of America executives, local elected officials, family members of Club founder William J. Oakes, and current Oakes Club members gathered at the Clubhouse to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the branch and its formal dedication as a designated historical site.

In a jubilant celebration that echoed the October 25, 1942 Preview Showing and the May 23, 1943 Dedication, exuberant staff members were excited to give tours of the facility and share the successes of youth who had passed through the doors.

Three days later, during a Boys & Girls Clubs of America National Conference in San Diego, the Board of Directors of Boys & Girls Clubs of America held its quarterly meeting at the Oakes Club. Board members, including baseball Hall-of-Famer Ken Griffey, Jr., were awed by the pristine condition of the facility.

The life of the William J. Oakes Boys Club of San Diego had come full circle, with many more noteworthy chapters yet to be written.

And to think it all began so very long ago, at this same site, in another era, with one selfless man who had the extraordinary integrity, humanity, courage, and strength of will to resolutely go … AGAINST THE GRAIN.

THE END
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Richard Saldivar, March 24, 2016
Cecil Steppe, March 8, 2016
Leroy John Taylor, March 14, 2016
Sammy Taylor, March 14, 2016
Arthur (Hambone) Williams, March 10, 2016
Dan Weber, July 26, 2016
David Woods, March 2, 2016
Rafino (Junior) Yaptangco, March 29, 2016

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Cleveland (Smiley) Jones
Honorable Napoleon Jones, Jr.
Charles E. (Charlie) Powell
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Photos and memorabilia courtesy of early William J. Oakes Boys Club of San Diego members.


BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF GREATER SAN DIEGO

CHANGING LIVES.
The first black educator at Memorial Junior High School in Logan Heights was a young, idealistic music teacher who dressed up every day like she was going someplace special. To her, she was.

When Helen Nelson accepted the Memorial position in the 1940s, her white colleagues chided her, asking, “Why would you teach there? The kids are uneducable. Throwaways. They won’t amount to anything.”

Memorial Principal William J. Oakes, a white man, did not agree with that derogatory assessment. Nor did the Boys Club of San Diego’s enthusiastic early supporters. Key elected officials, influential civic leaders and philanthropists joined together to galvanize construction of the Club. They helped propel it forward as this first Boys Club in San Diego County surmounted obstacle after obstacle in its struggle to survive.

In segregated San Diego, the Boys Club became a rare and shining beacon of integration; a mixture of blacks, whites, Hispanics, Filipinos and recent immigrants from around the world. They were united by poverty and society’s marginalization of them.

Outside the Club, financial hardship, broken homes and suffocating racism beat down the kids daily. Inside their safe harbor, external issues disappeared. Fun and friendship beckoned. Opportunities to grow and achieve uplifted the kids daily.


Inside are their stories and the story of benevolent San Diegans who went against the grain to help them and hundreds of thousands of boys and girls succeed over the past 75 years.

The compelling tale of Historical Landmark No. 1114, the oldest continuously operating Boys & Girls Clubhouse in Southern California, is a powerful story in which all San Diegans can take pride.

How did the Boys Club of San Diego manage to get built in 1942? And how, operating initially with a skeleton staff and sans adequate furnishings, combined with ever-present monetary challenges, was it able to begin turning boys into men?

The Great Depression. World War II. Pernicious, pervasive bigotry. A dire scarcity of materials, men and – most alarmingly – money for construction. Internecine squabbles. An unexpected change of architects mid-stream. A frantic, last-minute search for a suitable director. And, oh no – just when the initial facility of its kind in the region was scheduled to open, the still-unmet need for a chain link fence required to encircle this edifice embedded in a high-crime, gang-infested area.

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Seventy-five years ago, in an era of oppressive discrimination, a determined group established the Boys Club of San Diego, providing disadvantaged boys of diverse ethnicities with guidance and support to become some of the greatest athletes and leaders San Diego has ever produced.

Today, alumni whose lives were changed at the William J. Oakes Branch of what is today Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater San Diego strive to better the lives of a new generation of Logan Heights children.