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Boys and Girls Club of the Plateau breaks ground

BY KAT FORD

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Feb. 24 marked the groundbreaking for construction of the new Boys and Girls Club of the Plateau facility in Cashiers. As with all monumental groundbreakings, it started with a shovel photo op, digging a single hole. In this case, the symbolism of that hole stretches far beyond what the casual onlooker might perceive. The Boys and Girls Club of the Plateau is not merely securing a strong foundation. They are allowing for a place where roots can grow.

Opening in 2014, the BGCP was founded by local leaders out of an identified need for affordable after-school enrichment to assist working families in the area. Initially serving somewhere between 40 and 50 children, within six short years, the Club now services 250 members, nearly 50 percent of the community's children- the national average for a Boys and Girls Club is seven percent. With such growth in membership, BGCP had outgrown its current leased space; leaders began looking at options. The community outpour of support was swift and overwhelming. Cashiers invests in posterity.

It isn't enough to just have space; the BGCP needs "cool" space.

"We need them to choose BGCP," said Josh Helms, executive director of the BGCP. "The key to getting kids through graduation is to enroll them in second or third grade, but by the time they are in middle school, they get to choose where they want to be."

Currently, 19 percent of the members of the BGCP are teenagers. For the roughly 80 percent of children below the seventh grade, space means having room to explore many subjects, to intuitively discover what makes them tick. Odyssey of the Mind has been considered one of the most significant problem-solving programs nationally for children since it began in 1978. Thanks to BGCP and volunteer Carmen Waite, creative thinkers from artists to engineers experience the kind of imagining that leads to future vocational paths. More dedicated space for current programming allows staff and leadership to spend less time strategizing space and more time fleshing out the logistics to offer curious minds future cultural and recreational experiences, camps, field trips and opportunities.

"Fundraising efforts in support of our children and the new facility have been nothing short of amazing. To date, we have raised just over \$4.8 million toward our capital goal of \$5.2 million, and the outpouring of support so humbles us. This is a true reflection on our great community, our donors, volunteers, staff and board members- we are so very grateful," said Nat Turner, board president of BGCP.

While many came together to raise money for the nearly completed Capital Campaign and Expansion Fund, several local businesses have stepped in to ensure those funds go to good use. Jim Robinson, owner and architect of Cashiers-based Design South Builders, sits on the board of the BGCP.

"It is an honor to serve in a leadership position, but I treasure this unique opportunity to use my skills and expertise in designing the new building," said Robinson.

Robinson had several things in mind when creating the future home for children of the plateau to grow.

First, he wanted it to have mountain flair, using natural and substantial materials found in Cashiers and Highlands. The design is handsome and approachable, forming an impression on young members that they are valued.

Second, he wanted a feeling of home, with an open floor plan. Thanks to input and suggestions from the BGCP



Submitted photo

Members and leaders from the Boys and Girls Club of the Plateau prepare to break ground on the group's new facility.

staff, the new building will consist of one large communal area with multiple adjoining classrooms but no hallways. This allows for safety and for staff to keep an eye on many places at once. Each classroom has a single bathroom and handwashing station.

While equipping each room with a bathroom allows for pod learning during times such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the absence of multi-stall bathrooms also helps curb bullying. With a layout that ultimately made a big square, Jim saw the opportunity to raise the ceilings with trusts and clear windows and add a porte cochere for visual interest. The gable roof gives a sense of protection and helps with rain. The porte cochere is attached to the kitchen and allows staff to deliver food to families while protected from the elements, inspired by the Cashiers Emergency Food Collaboration created during the spring quarantine of 2020.

Construction ahead

Marty Reid of Reid's Construction in Lake Toxaway will be bringing the plans to life. A life-long resident of the plateau, Marty understands how important it is for rural children to have a safe place to interact with each other while under the supervision of good role models. Reid's Construction specializes in building custom homes, outdoor living spaces and commercial projects- they have built several local church buildings tailored for youth and community members. It should come as no surprise that Marty would be enthusiastic about the opportunity to be part of creating a first-class facility for the BCGP. Valuing deeds over sentiment, Reid's Construction is not only building the complex, but they are also doing so at a discounted rate- cutting their costs for the betterment of the youth.

Jennings Builders Supply & Hardware rounds out the team of building generosity, also offering to supply the BGCP materials at a discounted rate.

"We are very excited to participate in the BGCP in Cashiers," said Jennings Builders Supply & Hardware President and General Manager Glenn



Submitted photo

Braden Rogde, a fifth-grader who has been in the plateau club since its inception, helps get the work started on the group's new facility.

Hoy. "Giving back to the communities in which we operate has always been a trademark of our culture at Jennings, and we look forward to continuing to support our local communities with the support of our new ownership group, US LBM."

With such strong community support ensuring the foundation for Cashiers' youth, there is no doubt that the BCGP will continue to be a place where strong roots take hold. These roots began with a single taproot, a group of forward-thinking founders in 2014, and continued to spread with donors' help through 2021. A shoot grew into a trunk from this vast root system, strong and reaching high- fortified

through ring after ring of dedicated donors, staff, board members and volunteers. The single priority of the roots and trunk has always been to create a stable environment to allow its leaves to reach their full potential in the sun. These leaves, the young lives that benefit from the BGCP, bask in the warmth of opportunity, taking in vital nutrients, waiting for the moment to bloom. When the time comes, the bud will become an acorn, ready to fall from the tree and start its own life. To quote Emerson, "the creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn." The people of Cashiers know all about forests. Through the BCGP, they are preparing many young acorns for the world.