

Boys & Girls Clubs of America: Celebrate site number 200 serving Wisconsin youth

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Portage, WI — Boys & Girls Clubs of Wisconsin celebrated the opening of its 200th Club location in the state, making the City of Portage the 75th community served by the organization. The ribbon-cutting ceremony and open house for the new facility was held on Thursday at the Rusch Building in Portage, located at 117 West Franklin Street. Youth will first be entering the club at the former Rusch Elementary School starting May 1st.

“We want to thank the local community, service organizations, school, City of Portage, corporations, and the police department for making this happen,” said Erika Sween, a local Portage School Teacher. “We couldn’t have done this without so many Portage leaders investing in our kids.” Sween was one of a handful of organizers dubbed the “*Build a Club*” group who led the process over two years.

“The legacy of youth success starts at the Portage Boys & Girls Club on May 1st,” said Karen DeSanto, the organization’s Chief Executive Officer. “The possibilities are endless, and we will be relying on the entire community to ensure our success and longevity for decades to come.” DeSanto also noted the donations by the school, the city and local companies and philanthropist who helped raise initial funding.

Wisconsin clubs have witnessed tremendous growth since 2020, including new sites opening in Altoona, Menomonie, Manitowoc, Kiel, Shawano, Green Lake, Ripon, Rhinelander and Red Cliff. There has also been expansion at existing sites across the Fox Valley, Beloit, La Crosse, Oshkosh and Milwaukee. Clubs are on track to reach over 144,000 youth served, the high mark before the pandemic, by the end of 2024.

With the Portage addition, Wisconsin Clubs now serve over 101,000 youth at 200 clubs across 75 cities, allowing tens of thousands of parents to work during the crucial hours between 3 pm and 6 pm. Wisconsin clubs also serve more kids per population than any other state in the country, and more youth than any private organization in the state. They have over 2300 staff, over 8400 volunteers and \$155 million in private infrastructure.

“Counties spend more than \$300,000 a year per youth to house juveniles at Lincoln Hills or Copper Lake. Without clubs across Wisconsin, government would pay even more for juvenile detention, prisons, addiction recovery, and unemployment lines,” said Andy Gussert, state director. “Clubs literally save the government money, while generating tax revenue for future state budgets.” Less than 5% of funding statewide comes to clubs from state taxpayers. For every \$1 dollar the state invests, clubs raise another \$19 dollars in funding from local communities, businesses, foundations, philanthropists and other sources.

Every dollar invested in Clubs returns \$9.60 in future earnings and cost-savings to communities. Studies show local or state club investment means higher graduation rates, a better workforce, more future tax revenue and lower health care costs. For example, a teenage dropout costs taxpayers an average of \$292,000 over a lifetime. Boys & Girls Clubs run “Be Great Graduate” program across Wisconsin allowing hundreds of at risk youth to graduate.

For 135 years, since 1887, Wisconsin Boys & Girls Clubs (www.bgcwisconsin.org) have provided a safe place for kids and teens to learn and grow. Clubs offer caring adult mentors, fun and friendship, and high-impact youth development programs on a daily basis during critical non-school hours. Boys & Girls Clubs programming promotes academic success, good character and leadership, and healthy lifestyles.