



By **BILL SHAW**



# **BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB OF BRAZORIA COUNTY**

*"In every community, boys and girls are left to find their own recreation and companionship in the streets. An increasing number of children are at home with no adult care or supervision. Young people need to know that someone cares about them."*

Boys and Girls Club of Brazoria County Web site [www.bgcbc.com](http://www.bgcbc.com).

## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT



In the midst of the chaos and confusion and a multitude of life-threatening challenges of childhood and adolescence, many youngsters need a sense of security and belonging their environments don't provide.

The Boys and Girls Club of Brazoria County organized to meet those needs in 1972 and has grown into a multi-site haven for kids to be kids. Specifically the mission of the Boys and Girls Club of Brazoria County is "To inspire and enable all young people to realize their full potential as productive, responsible and caring citizens." The Club

as executive director for two years. "It's amazing what these kids can do when given the chance."

"Our focus (is) on young people from disadvantaged circumstances," the national office emphasizes. "Boys and Girls Clubs serve all school-age youth, especially from disadvantaged circumstances who have the fewest resources but face the greatest obstacles. Young people from difficult economic, social and family situations are our first priority. If we do not serve them, who will?"

The Clubs core programs include character and leadership

development, education and career development, health and life skills, the arts and sports, fitness and recreation.

Chaya Sidney, unit director of the Boys and Girls Club, works with school based programs, which include Connections, a licensed childcare program open from the time school is dismissed until 6:00 p.m. The Boys and Girls Club supervises six sites: at Rancho Isabella Elementary in Angleton; at A. P. Beutel Elementary, Bess Brannen Elementary, Elizabeth Ney Elementary and O. M. Roberts in Lake Jackson; and at Gladys Polk Elementary in Richwood.

The Connection sites provide outdoor recreation and daily homework help, as well as age-appropriate activities in building

materials, drama, board games, creative art and reading.

"The Connections program gives many of the children the opportunity to feel secure and feel as if they matter because of the consistency of the staff involved," said Sidney.

"Some youngsters' behavior has improved because of the staff's developing discipline one-on-one. The parents appreciate the convenience as well as the activities and programs we offer. Connections is particularly helpful for only children because they get to mingle and socialize."

Sidney also supervises traditional Boys and Girls Clubs at T. W. Ogg Elementary and Madge Griffith Elementary in Lake Jackson, but these sites do not provide licensed child care.

The most active Boys and Girls Club afternoon site is the stand-alone facility in Freeport housed in the old Freeport Intermediate School gym, which the school

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Top Left: Joshua Lars, homework tutor, helps Briana Muraira, with her math homework.  
Above: Rebecca Ransas, technology director at the Boys & Girls facility in Freeport, helps Alejandra Arevalo, 7, with her computer work.

seeks to provide "a positive place for kids."

Recognizing the importance of the presence of the Club in the community, the United Way of Brazoria County has supported the organization for 32 of the 33 years of its existence.

Fay Beard, executive director, supervises the operation of the Club in Brazoria County, which is overseen by the national organization that celebrated its 99<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the convention in San Diego in April. The Brazoria County group includes eight school-based sites and a stand-alone facility in Freeport. Six of the school-based sites are licensed day care centers with scaled fees based on income.

"The Boys and Girls Club has used youth development strategies that unite all of our programs to build adult responsibility and a sense of belonging in a place that the members know they fit and a sense of community in which they know they can do well," said Beard, who has served

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district has leased to the organization. Pam Lambert, branch director, supervises the facility.

"The Freeport Branch provides a safe, positive place for kids to hang out after school and during the summer - a place where kids sense that they belong and that they are cared about - a place where their opinions and interests count - and a place where they are exposed to a variety of activities and can discover something that they are good at," said Lambert.

Club membership is only \$5.00, and the facility provides a wealth of activities for the membership fee.

"Club members participate in a variety of age-appropriate activities from large group drop-in activities to small groups, clubs, and individual instruction," said Lambert. "We have

fishing clinics and fishing trips, dance clubs, games room tournaments, spaghetti dinners for the families and members, arts and crafts daily, heart pumping games daily, basketball, indoor hockey, computer activities with high speed DSL, homework help, cultural enrichment activities, and special events like the End of School Blitz with a rock climbing wall, dunking booth, moonwalk, archery alley and fish prints."

The Freeport facility also stages a "Summer Fun" camp. "We will have a variety of clinics and weekly activities to meet the interests of all children," said Lambert. "Press and photography clubs, Weird Science, cooking classes, the Ultimate Journey, Smart Moves (a program in goal setting, discipline and self-sufficiency), the Reading Club, and aerobic classes will also be offered weekly. We shall also offer summer programs in drama, hip hop dance, cheerleading, martial arts, music, CSI (Crime

Scene Investigation), drawing, sculpting, watercolor and arts and crafts. Field trips will include swimming at the Freeport pool and Wacky Water Day for those members that do not know how to swim. The Reading Club will go to the public library each week for special programs and an opportunity to check out books and earn rewards. Fishing, bowling, and skating trips will be alternated weekly.

Special programming for teens will consist of weekly three-on-three basketball tournaments and trips to the recreation center to play racquetball and wallyball and swim. Teens will have their own fine arts classes and weight lifting classes and Survivor Week.

Lambert also supervises a smaller group of youngsters in the Keystone Clubs at the Freeport site and at Brazoswood High School.

"We go on birding excursions and participate in fine arts exhibits," said Lambert. "The members participate in community service projects such as beach clean-ups and United Way Neighbor Day."

Many of the Keystone Club members are actively involved in Teen Court. Lambert's job is full and sometimes frustrating but rewarding.

"Before I took my current position, I helped out in the art room one day here at the club to ease the staffing load," said Lambert. "I had a room full of eager kids and one 'extra spirited' child. This child pushed the limits with her behavior, but was simply looking for attention and acceptance from me, the adult in the room. When she was leaving for the day, she wrapped her arms around me and asked me to come back. Tears fill my eyes each time I share this story. At the end of the day, all the frustrations are worth it when you know you are making a difference in

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the lives of children one day at a time."

The organization also motivates, inspires and develops its members.

Zach Noblitt personifies the best in the Boys and Girls Club. He received the 2005 Youth of the Year Award at the annual Steak and Burger Banquet on Feb. 3. Noblitt is a senior at Brazoswood High School and actively involved in debate, varsity tennis, the Scholastic Bowl, University Interscholastic League competition and the National Honor Society. He has a grade point average of 4.0.

Noblitt contributed over 1200 hours to the Keystone Club's Teen Court program. He is president of the Brazosport Community Teen Court and worked with the court coordinator to establish a teen court at Brazoswood High School.

"I've been a member of the Club for five years. I got involved in the Club through joining Teen Court. In addition to Teen Court, I participate in the Keystone Club, which is a community-service oriented club. I also organized an event at the Club called 'Let's Just Play Day' to increase awareness of physical fitness, a national Keystone project."

Noblitt sees distinct advantages of participation in the Boys and Girls Club.

"For me personally, the Club has allowed me to develop my genuine personality," said Noblitt. "I was always friendly, but shy. Now I have a more outgoing personality, which I'm more comfortable with. It has also been a source of support and advice when I face challenges."

Bryson Byrd, 16, another active Brazoswood High School member of the Keystone Club and Teen Court, appreciates what the Boys and Girls Club has done for him as well.

"The Boys and Girls club has shown me what it takes to be a positive leader in our community," said Byrd. "It has also shown me how my life could be if I wasn't able to make positive decisions through teen court. It has taught me so much about myself as well as, how much I need to be thankful for in my life. Teen Court, as well as the Boys and Girls Club truly has taught me how to be a leader."

The Boys and Girls Club of Brazoria County groups and facilities are a safe haven for youngsters to learn and grow and to have fun, "The Positive Place for Kids." Last year, according to the Web site, the organization provided a "nurturing environment for more than 2,500 children" and a "safe haven" and a "fun alternative to the destructiveness of gangs and the opportunity to be a valuable asset to the community."

For additional information on the Boys and Girls Club of Brazoria County, its mission, programs, facilities and opportunities, see [www.bgcbc.com](http://www.bgcbc.com) or call 979-373-9668. ▲



Pam Lambert, Boys & Girls Club branch director and supervisor of the Freeport facility, poses with some of her "kids," from l-r, Ruben Garcia, 7, Andron Bush, 7, Titiana Perry, 6, Ashley Stanley, 7, and Jacoba Boles, 8



Elizabeth Jasso and Micaela Urbina, enjoy the daily arts and crafts.