

FIRST CLUB, FIRST BOARD DR. JIM HANNA

CELEBRATING
50
YEARS
SERVING OUR YOUTH



Dr. Hanna early in his dental career

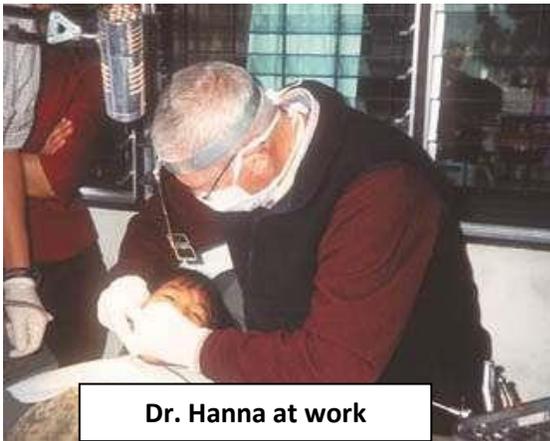
Over 50 years ago, at a field trial (a competitive event for dogs), Dr. Jim Hanna didn't realize his life would take a plunge into helping create Billings, Montana's first Boys Club (later to become the Boys & Girls Club). As Dr. Hanna tells it "Ernie Goppert, a Cody, WY attorney, was at the field trial. He and I got to talking and he said he knew a banker (Tim Healey) in Billings who was forming a Boys Club. Would I be interested in helping?" With more conversation, Dr. Hanna agreed he would be interested in helping. After many, many planning meetings, raising funds and scouting places to meet, the

Boys Club was opened in the basement of what was the old Parmly Library (now the Western Heritage Center). "It was filthy. Nothing had been in the building for quite a while. So, we met there on weekends and cleaned and cleaned. Each person on the board chipped in to help. That original board did everything to get it (the Boys Club) off the ground. It was such a great group. Ask them, and they would do whatever was needed."

This location was temporary and within the first year, the Boys Club acquired and moved to the International Harvester Building thanks to some extremely generous individuals. This building was a blessing with an abundance of square footage for many programs. In fact, Dr. Hanna set-up a dental chair in one of the rooms and provided free dental exams to the boys. He also arranged for other dentists to donate their time to provide dental outreach. Having so much room in the building was a blessing, however, it was expensive to maintain and extremely expensive to heat. Dr. Hanna recalls many times as treasurer of the Board of Directors, he would have to call Tim Healey, the board President, and inform him they were almost out of money. Dr. Hanna said, "Healey would say, I'll get back to you. He would then make some calls and we would be able to pay our bills. We were always looking for money to keep the Club going. The board all helped solicit money and personally gave. You felt good about giving money for a situation like that."

The early years of the Club consisted of only a team of two employees: Gordon Eldridge, CEO and a program manager. “Gordon did a marvelous job. He really lifted us up. He would be there early to open the Club and stay late into the night. Then he would get up and do it all over again. The Board all helped as much as we could. We all had day jobs. After our work day, we would help out at the Club” shared Dr. Hanna.

In the early years, it really took the support of the community to make it work, both financially and programmatically. “Jimmy Gonzalez, a barber at the Northern Hotel, was in charge of the boxing program,” said Dr. Hanna. “College kids also helped. They were good with the kids. The kids related well to them. They helped get them on the right path. We had some real ornery kids in those early years, juvenile delinquents. That place really helped the kids.”



Dr. Hanna at work

A highlight for many of the boys and favorite memory of Dr. Hanna’s was when 8 – 10 of the boys got to go to a sheep camp on the Stillwater. “Many of the boys had never been outside of Billings. We spent a couple days sleeping in tents, fishing and eating wild meat. It was a real good outing for them,” recalled Dr. Hanna.

The number of Club members grew quickly. “Boy, word gets around. Those kids knew when there was something good. They were always hungry and would get cookies and milk in the early years.” Dr. Hanna explained. “Later on, the food program expanded to serve meals. It was great for the kids.”

Dr. Hanna was on the founding Boy’s Club Board of Directors and served 12 years on the board. During this time he was the 4th president and held the position for 4 years. “The most difficult part of my time was that we were always in trouble with finances. The Harvester building was costly to maintain,” Dr. Hanna said. “However, we always found a way to make it work. We had many generous community members. You can’t do it alone. Good people make the world of difference.”

Toward the end of Dr. Hanna’s service on the board, there was talk about adding a gym onto the back of the Club building. This desire for a gym, along with many

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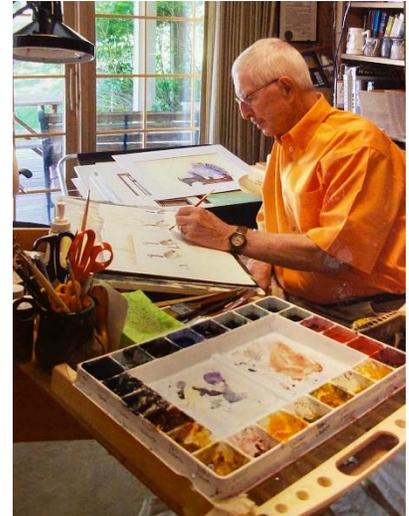


other reasons including the closing of Taft Elementary School (resulting in less kids in the area of the Club) and the \$1,000 a month heating cost led to discussions about building a new Club. The board was divided on the decision because some believed it would not be possible to raise the 1.2 million needed to buy the land and build the new Club.

However, a significant gift from Alberta Bair made the vision of a newly built Club, within “reach.” “She was a generous person. When she was in town, she would visit the Club. Everyone liked her,” recalled Dr. Hanna.

So again, after many, many planning meetings, raising funds and scouting places to build, the new home of the Boys & Girls Club was opened at 505 Orchard Lane. Dedicated as the Charles M. Bair Family Memorial Building, the Club continues today to serve kids, *especially those who need us most.*

“I am so glad I was part of the Club. It was an honor to have served on the first board. I feel really good about that,” stated Dr. Hanna.



Dr. Hanna as an artist