

Interview for the 30th Anniversary of the Club (2001) with Bobby Valenzuela

This is only part of the original interview - discussing the “beginning”

Note: The “Gordon” referred to, is Gordon Eldredge, the first Executive Director of the Club.

Kevin Kooistra, Community Historian of the Western Heritage Center interview with Bobby Valenzuela, one of the first members of the Boys Club.

What role did you play in the Boys and Girls Club?

I was one of the first members of the club when it was in the Western Heritage building and then moved over to the International Harvester Building.

How did you first hear of the Club? Did someone come to your door and say we are going to have a Boys Club?

The kids we always hung around with told us, they lived in the same neighborhood. They had mentioned that they had a place where you could go hang out - play pool, foosball and whatever you wanted to. So one night we just walked in there and said ‘well what does it take to become a member’, and they said a dollar. Filled out a piece of paper and gave them a buck and they gave us a card with a number on it.

What was the set up at the time? You were at the old Library building, of course.

Real small - one pool table. They had a few games and stuff - a TV.

But it was only there for a little while?

Not very long at all, and that’s when they moved into the big building – International Harvester.

What kind of activities would they have for 7-year-olds?

Well, when we first started at the old building, not many. But when we moved to the IH building, they had field trips; you could go to sheep camp, you could go to Conter’s ranch up at Pompey’s, they had weekend trips to Yellowstone National Park and then just volunteer to do things at the Club. When they had the board meetings and they would serve the banquets at night and stuff, rather than having it catered in, Dorothy Trank was her name, and she was a chef, or a cook, and she would come in and ask for volunteers to help cook the dinners. And we would make dinners for 30 people.

The boys would actually

...from a full course meal to desserts to afterwards - everything. We prepared everything. And once I turned 13, I actually got hired through Youth Manpower for a job at the Club. So, not only was I still a member, but I also worked there.

How long?

I worked there from age 13 until 16 - about three years.

What kind of changes did you see in the club from the time you joined as a 7 year old until you were a Manpower employee?

Oh, equipment wise? All the older run-down tables that they started out with - people would donate pool tables that they didn’t need any more, foosball tables - newer foosball tables, and they built a woodshop with all the power tools and stuff to create things. The arts and crafts - we did pottery. Put them in molds, break them open - oh, they were awesome. They had the fire kiln and then had glazed paint to use and then you cooked them again. These things were unbelievable - I mean, they were neat. They built an archery stand set up where you could shoot archery, then on alternating days we could shoot BB guns. We built the basketball team for the Boys Club and went around and played different churches. We weren’t in the church, but we played in the league with the churches in town.

So you probably participated in everything.

Everything, man. When we got out of school at 3:00pm, it was in the front door, throw your books down, and out the back door you went through the alley. Only lived about four blocks from the Boys Club, so we would be there from 3:30pm until it closed at five o’clock for dinner. Run home to eat dinner and be standing outside at six o’clock waiting for it to open back up again.