

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Boys & Girls Club of the Bemidji Area to open Blackduck Branch in Fall 2024

BEMIDJI, Minn. -- The Boys & Girls Club of the Bemidji Area announced today it will open a Blackduck Branch of Club services in partnership with Blackduck Public School, co-locating within the school. The new branch will open at the start of the 2024 school year.

“This is an exciting time for us,” said Andrea Kent, Boys & Girls Club of the Bemidji Area executive director. “A lot of people have been working over the past four years to bring together the leadership and funding to make this dream possible. We are grateful to the school leadership, United Way and the whole Blackduck community for welcoming us and partnering with us to serve Blackduck youth.”

The Blackduck Branch will serve up to 100 youth in grades K-8, operating all day Mondays when Blackduck school is not in session and after school Tuesday through Friday. Plans for a summer program will be announced in the spring of 2025.

“We are thrilled to see the expansion of the Boys & Girls Clubs into Blackduck,” said Denae Alamano, United Way of Bemidji Area executive director. “This is a crucial step in addressing some of the most critical needs in the Blackduck community. United Way is proud to support this endeavor and thankful for the generous support of Blackduck residents to support their youth.”

The new branch is made possible by a grant from the Minnesota Department of Education, which will fund approximately 60 percent of the operations for the first two years. Additional programming support will be secured through individual and business donations, special events, membership fees, ongoing support from the United Way and grants.

Discussions about expanding Club services to Blackduck began in 2020 when United Way expanded its Backpack Buddies program to Blackduck to address childhood and teen food insecurity and established a mobile food pantry. At that time, community members also expressed the need for high-quality, consistent after-school programming. And United Way approached the Boys & Girls Club to explore possibilities.

Through the Minnesota Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs, which represents Clubs across the state, discussions began about how to better meet the needs of youth, especially in rural Minnesota. The Alliance began advocating to the state legislature for funds to help expand and establish new youth programs in new neighborhoods and new communities. The first funds were secured in the

summer of 2023. After extensive local organizing between the Blackduck School District and community members, Blackduck was awarded a grant to fund a Club expansion in 2024.

“Blackduck School is looking forward to sharing our space with the Boys and Girls Club to provide our community with an excellent opportunity for our youth,” said Peter Bahr, Blackduck Dean of Students. “I look forward to seeing the possibilities they will offer and provide to our students.”

Club programming features three priority areas: academic, health, and leadership with wrap-around programs focusing on social & emotional skills, art, STEM, prevention, mentoring and more. The Club anticipates serving up to 100 students, in a 1 staff to 15 youth ratio, in grades K-8.

ENROLLMENT

Student who wish to enroll must complete a membership application (one per student). Application materials will be released in May 2024 and be available in the Blackduck school elementary and high school offices and also at www.bgcbemidji.org.

Students must be registered to attend, complete all membership paperwork and attend a mandatory, in-person orientation with their parent and/or guardian. No drop-in attendance will be available. In the event the Club reaches membership capacity, the Club will begin a waiting list. Financial aid will be available, on a limited basis, for those qualifying families. For interested families of Blackduck students, text @BGCBduck to 81010 to receive Remind updates.

EMPLOYMENT

Both full-time and part-time employment opportunities will be available and are posted on Indeed.com and at www.bgcbemidji.org.

VOLUNTEER

Volunteers are critical to the launch of the Blackduck Branch in September. Anyone interested in helping guide and market the new Club branch should contact Lori Lundberg at lori@northwoodslumber.com or Andrea Kent, BGCBA Executive Director at andrea.kent@bgcbemidji.org

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The Boys & Girls Club of the Bemidji Area serves more than 300 youth, ages 6-18, with after-school and summer programs, plus teen nights. Nutritious snacks are served after-school, as well as lunch, M-F, in the summer. For a nominal fee, kids find a fun and safe place to build academic success, healthy lifestyles and good character & citizenship. The Boys & Girls Club of the Bemidji Area is located at 1600 Minnesota Avenue. For more information, see bgcbemidji.org or call (218) 444-4171.