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BOYS & GIRLS CLUB
OF THE BEMIDJI AREA

BEMIDJI
newsletter

SPRING 2026

SAVE THE DATES:

2026



GOLF CHAMPIONSHIP
BEMIDJI : AUG 24TH
BLACKDUCK : AUG 28TH



BLACKDUCK BONANZA
OCTOBER 24TH



Give from the Heart. Every Month.

- Consistent impact with one simple monthly gift
- Easy, automatic giving that fits your budget
- Stay connected to the mission with regular updates on the impact of your gift
- Know your heart is at work year-round, helping kids learn, grow, and thrive

For more information scan the QR code to visit our web page or contact Emily Fairchild at emily.fairchild@bgcbemidji.org



Congratulations to:

- Olivia G.**
Youth of the Year
- Olivia K.**
Junior Youth of the Year
- Michael P.**
Youth of the Year Finalist
- Amarachi O.**
Junior Youth of the Year Finalist
- Ellie G.**
Junior Youth of the Year Finalist

Behind the Scenes:
Stepping Into The Portal

Just one month in, The Portal - the Club's new e-gaming and technology space - is already buzzing with energy, filled daily with curious and creative Club members eager to explore something new.

Led by Andrew Fairbanks, who joined the team earlier this year, The Portal is more than just a place to play - it's a space to learn, generate ideas, and connect. Through hands-on programming, Club members are exploring content creation through indie games, learning the basics of recording and commentary, and diving into graphic design through fun, interactive challenges. Weekly conversations around digital citizenship also help kids build the skills they need to safely navigate the online world.

"I want kids to see that gaming can be more than just playing - it can be creating, designing, and even building skills for the future,"

-Andrew

The learning continues to grow, with student interest already sparking upcoming opportunities in computer programming and other tech-based skills.

What makes The Portal even more special is how it came to life. This space wasn't just built for Club members - it was built with them. Tweens and Teens helped assemble furniture, shape the room's vision, and even built the computers themselves, creating a space that truly feels like their own.

With support from Paul Bunyan Communications powered by GigaZone and funding from the After-School Community Learning Grant, this immersive environment has become more than just a room - it's a launching point for creativity, confidence, and future opportunities.

Thanks to:



NOTE: Some programs featured in this publication are partially funded with a grant from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) using state funding, After-School Community Learning Programs. The contents of this publication do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education or the Minnesota Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal or state government.



J.W. Smith Update

We are overjoyed that J.W. Smith Elementary will remain open for the 2026-2027 school year! A huge thanks to the school board for voting no on the motion to close J.W. Smith Elementary. The support from the community has been so joyful to see, and we are grateful for the way the teachers, families, community, and Club staff all came together to advocate for the children and families of J.W. Smith.

The closure of this neighborhood school would have a huge impact on Club operations, as the Club's J.W. Smith Branch is co-located in the school and serves 80-90 children, K-3, each weekday during the school year. It also serves as the drop-off site within the neighborhood for many additional Club members to access the Clubhouse programs. Because the school district continues to face budget concerns, the Club's leadership staff and board of directors will keep working on creating contingency plans to ensure the Club can successfully serve our community.

We are eager to continue working with our community and school board to meet the needs and keep J.W. Smith Elementary open to serve youth.

MEET OUR NEW STAFF



Andrew Fairbanks
Cultural Liaison



Clare Sunde
Interim J.W. Smith Branch Director



Jordan Mann
Member Services Assistant Director



Michele Rupert
Clubhouse Tween/Teen Assistant Director

Gala Recap

VIEW GALA PICTURES HERE



Our annual gala was on February 20, with over 200 people attending to support the Club's mission! The evening was full of fun, generosity, and meaningful stories about the Club's impact on youth. Because of supporters like YOU, including generous sponsorships, donations of wonderful auction items, and investments in the success of Club kids, the Club raised over \$264,000 - about 10% of our annual budget. WOW!

These funds support year-round programs across all three of our locations. The gala is our biggest fundraising event of the year, and it wouldn't be possible without generosity from incredible people like you. **Thank you!**

Several Club youth were featured at the event and spoke about the amazing impact the Club has had on their lives and what it means to them. These included our Youth of the Year participant Olivia Glander. The event also included a celebration of this year's Sue Engel Spirit of the Mission award recipient, Lou Ann Knorr, in gratitude for her many years of service to Club kids. Read more about Lou Ann in this newsletter. To see pictures from this wonderful event visit our website or scan the QR code above!

Mark your calendars now for next year's gala on February 26, 2027 with an all new theme *The Greatest Show!*



Honoring the Spirit of the Mission



Lou Ann Knorr receives the Sue Engel Spirit of the Mission Award

The Spirit of the Mission - established in 2023 in memory of Sue Engel, founding board member and first president - is awarded annually in recognition of an individual who demonstrates extraordinary volunteerism, passionate advocacy and promotion of the Club's activities and mission, and meaningful financial support that advances its impact.

Lou Ann was a member of the Club Board of Directors from 2013 to 2022 and served as treasurer for eight of those years. She also chaired the Finance Committee and sat on the Executive Committee.

Lou Ann was presented the award at our Gala in February where she was joined by her husband John, mother Irene, three sisters, and Club friends.

Lou Ann expressed her gratitude for the award, and her appreciation for others who she has served alongside with, especially Finance Committee members over the years: Paul Iverson, Paul Lindseth, RoxAnn Aaberg, Craig Boyer, Dan Nynas, and especially Karl Mork (VP of Business Operations). These dedicated volunteers, with Lou Ann as chair for several years, provided expert financial and resource development insights to help guide the Club's organizational health and sustainability.

Lou Ann closed by saying, *"I believe each of us has a bit of Sue's Spirit of the Mission in us."*



Did you know?

Being a part of the Legacy Society looks different for each donor.

Here in Bemidji, there's no one-size-fits-all approach to leaving a legacy - just a shared commitment to local kids.

What legacy giving can look like:

Paul, 88

- Lifelong Bemidji resident & retired educator
- Spent decades supporting local youth
- Included the Club in his will, along with BSU
- "I want kids to always have a safe place to go."

Molly, 40

- Local parent raising a young family
- Wanted to give back in a meaningful but manageable way
- Named the Club as a life insurance beneficiary through work
- "It was simple-and it makes a lasting impact."

Your legacy, your way.

No matter your age or stage of life, you can create a lasting impact for kids in our community - today and for generations to come.



Email us to explore your options!

Scan the QR code or email emily.fairchild@bgcbemidji.org