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Senior Class

Barbara Cloud



Adults and children join together in a joyous renovation

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By Barbara Cloud, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

It went on without much notice, unless you were around the Shadyside Boys & Girls Club during the days leading up to the July 11 All-Star game.

There were no red carpet and no jets flying overhead -- in other words, no hoopla.

There were just yellow T-shirts. Lots of them.

Elves of all sizes and ages, defined by bright yellow T-shirts, spent days going in and out of the Eugene R. Phillipone Memorial Building at 6 Brownell Place, off Ellsworth Avenue.

This is where children have found fun and games -- and guidance, nurturing and maturity development -- for more than 100 years.

All were working together to renovate a place which has fostered so many youngsters as they seek to learn about floor hockey, Ping-Pong, basketball, arts and crafts -- just being kids.

Major League Baseball had teamed up with the nonprofit Frank Foundation, based in Phoenix, to help the Boys & Girls Clubs of America remain secure and growing.

Together they go into the city where the All-Star game is played each year (this was the second, the first city was Detroit) and after a committee has selected the club to be renovated, they go to work.

I mean, they really work.

Jon and Christy Frank, who started the foundation, left their own three daughters with his parents in Tucson, Ariz., so they could spend a week

here in old clothes, chopping weeds around the parking lot, painting the entire interior in bright shades of purple, yellow, green and red, and just taking care of the logistics of such an undertaking.

It's huge, and they are learning along the way. They have also partnered with Childhelp USA and the Phoenix Children's Hospital to renovate the hospital's family living center.

Working beside them were some of the youngsters who go to this particular club, some of them so tiny their T-shirts almost touched the tops of their tennis shoes -- but they were there doing what they could as parents and other volunteers worked daily to spruce up the place.

It was inspiring to see a grown man showing a 6-year-old how to use a roller or a paint brush, and help carry debris to a trash bin.

Giant Eagle and Gregg Caliguiri's Deli Co. shared providing food each day for the volunteers. Hoagies, bottled water, fruit and sandwiches fed the volunteer army.

Some of the work was grueling, but there were only smiles on everyone's faces as day by day the results of the hard work and cleanup came to life.

The Franks -- he's a lawyer in Phoenix -- know that their own children understand their absence. Their children actually planted the idea in their parents' heads three years ago when the kids asked if they could give some of their toys to children less fortunate.

There was a toy drive, then the foundation was begun, and they took on bigger jobs.

As I walked around the Shadyside Club, it was deja vu for me. I was touching up purple and yellow paint as a volunteer in the very rooms I remember watching my son and his friends playing games.

I looked at all the coat hooks on one wall, and was remembering all the winter jackets and knitted caps and scarves that would smother the wall each winter as I waited for basketball or floor hockey games to end.

It was a great place for children to learn about others, many needing this place more than others. They work with a limited staff and a few part-timers.

Tom Yandora is executive director of this club. He marveled at the enthusiasm exhibited for five days. The work will be ongoing, but the rooms are now clean and cheerful.

My now-grown son, who lives in Phoenix and knows the Franks, was a volunteer. Watching him climb a ladder to paint a ceiling, I had to smile.

I knew it was all worth it. It all made sense: giving back.

Now there is some new equipment, lighting, a large television and fresh paint as a background for the laughter and the learning that will continue in a spruced-up atmosphere.

Of course, the best part was seeing people -- all stars in my book -- come together for a common goal: helping children.

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