



ALAMEDA BOYS & GIRLS CLUB



"You don't get too many opportunities in your life to make a lasting mark. [The club] is a real community resource."



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NEIGHBOR

**SALLY
RUDLOFF**
CRS

Kane & Associates,
Alameda, Calif.

Climbing a Mountain on Behalf of Kids

Sally Rudloff's ambitious capital campaign for her local Boys & Girls Club led to the creation of an exceptional haven for children.

In 2004, the Alameda Boys & Girls Club found itself at a turning point. The club, located in the center of this diverse California East Bay community, had long served as a haven for kids—many living in single-parent families—from Alameda's lower-income west end. The 60-year-old club provided an enriching, stimulating environment and kept kids off the streets between 3 p.m. and 7 p.m., peak hours for juvenile violent crime. But the crumbling old building needed an overhaul, and the repairs were estimated to cost at least \$2 million. What's more, the building's location made it difficult for kids to get there after school.

As president of the club's volunteer board, Sally Rudloff hired a consultant to help determine the feasibility of a new state-of-the-art club in a more convenient west end location. The projected cost for the proposed facility was \$10 million. "You'll never raise that much money in Alameda," Rudloff recalls the consultant telling her. Board members were crestfallen, but not for long. "We just looked at each other and said, 'We have to do it,'" says Rudloff, CRS, a salesperson with Kane & Associates in Alameda, Calif. "And then we did it."

Never say never to Rudloff. "If Mt. Everest shows up at your door and you're not expecting it," she says, "do

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By Jen Mierisch

you cry because it's there, or do you just go over it?"

Rudloff and her colleagues started climbing. Seven years later, in May 2011, the 25,000-square-foot Alameda Boys & Girls Club opened its doors. "The kids were so thrilled," Rudloff says. The adults were pretty impressed, too. "When we had our grand opening, I stood by the door and watched people come into the facility, and their mouths dropped open," says Rudloff. "It's absolutely beautiful inside."

The new Youth Development Center has key features in common with most Boys & Girls Clubs: a gymnasium, game room, and classroom space. What makes it special are the extras: a music room and soundproofed drum room where music lessons are offered; a tech lab that makes use of donated laptops; a commercial-grade kitchen for meal preparation and nutrition education; and a community garden in the back. Another special feature is an on-site dental clinic. Dr. Barry Parker, a friend of Rudloff's, recruited dentists to volunteer their time to screen kids and refer them for free treatment if needed. "It used to be that there was only one dentist in the area that accepted [Medicaid], and the kids couldn't get there.

Transportation is an issue for lots of our families," says Diane Rizzo, the club's interim director.

Rudloff has been a tireless volunteer for the club. As leader of the capital campaign for the facility, she conducted dozens of tours of the construction site for potential donors. "I have a hard hat with my name on it!" she declares proudly. She has also chaired the club's annual fund-raising auction and golf tournament, recruited board members and math tutors, and set up counseling services for 50 families. Over the past two years, she raised more than \$250,000 for the club. On top of that, she volunteers at the facility an average of 10 hours a week.

Community Impact

The board's fund-raising success sends an important message to the boys and girls who frequent the club, Rudloff says. "I think it gives them hope. They realize they don't have to listen to people who say 'You can't do it,' because you can."

John Hamilton, a 17-year-old high school senior who has frequented the club since 2005, is thrilled with the new space, which can accommodate about 3,000 children, compared to just 1,200 before. "The old fa-

cility was tiny. The number of kids we get now would have been impossible at the old building," he says.

"The kids are so proud of the building," Rudloff says. "There's graffiti around—but not here."

Rudloff's pride, too, of what the facility means to the community at large. "It represents a taking care of people who need our help, people who ordinarily might not get such a wonderful sense of community and belonging," she says.

Although she stepped down as board president in July, Rudloff is still dreaming big. She hopes to raise money for an oceanography education program and expand youth leadership opportunities at the club. "Sally has an innate ability to get people excited and pull them in," Rizzo says. "She gets you involved and, before you know it, you're on a journey. That's her gift." ■



Alameda's state-of-the-art Boys & Girls Club is a daily reminder to the families it serves about the power of a can-do attitude.