

## GUEST EDITORIAL

by Robert Tobin and Melissa Bagwell

# Auburn Teens: Doin' it for themselves

**M**ore than a dozen local teenagers were determined to make this past summer Auburn's best yet.

Responding to new opportunities for social interaction created by the Boys & Girls Club's purchase of the Firehouse Cafe, sixteen young people formed an event committee to organize an entertainment venue for local teenage talents.

Monique Richardson designed promotional flyers. Sara Pulse helped formalize contracts with entertainers. Deirdra Florez and Michelle Larson helped solicit refreshment donations. Blake Cooper, Ryan Llyn and others provided the stage crew and security. Others helped distribute flyers, arrange insurance coverage and police oversight, and seek financial contributions. Thanks to the support of adult mentors, like Linda Oddo and Daniella Zimmerman, all participants received first-hand experience in successful event planning.

The first of this year's events was held in May during the annual Fireman's Ball at the Gold Country Fairgrounds. Over 200 teenagers from all over the foothills paid three dollars to hear three local bands and enjoy food donated by Pak n' Save, Longs Drugs at Elm Center, Albertsons, Hilda's Pastries, Lucky's, BelAir, Foot-hill Volunteer Center and Firehouse Cafe.

More than 300 people were drawn to dance concerts in June and July, held in the Garden Amphitheatre at Placer County Library, which extended broader exposure to local bands like "The Livin' End" and the popular "Zoppo & the True Tones." After a hiatus in August, the cancellation of a recent concert due to rain prompted the group to start searching for indoor venues for these events.

The highlight of these events was the second annual free barbecue dinner, compliments of the Placer Business Network. T.J. Jackson, a Network member who helped organize last year's dinner, said that "...it was one of the most positive interactions between Auburn's young people and adults all year."

Noting there are over 30 service organizations in town, Jackson pointed out that "...if each group took one of these monthly events, they'd only have to do one about every three years to keep this good thing going for Auburn's kids."

The planning committee for these events is a spin-off from a teenage girl's group called I.M.A.G.E. (Independent Minds Actively Gaining Equality"). In addition to planning social events and hosting guest

speakers at its meetings, the group launched a clean-up project for a downtown park and organized a camping trip.

The I.M.A.G.E. group began meeting at the Firehouse Cafe just as its operations were taken over by the Boys & Girls Club of Auburn. The club's goal for this project is to involve young people in all aspects of the operation of a business that offers both younger and older adults a comfortable place to meet, eat and socialize. Apprenticeship positions involve teens in developing a delivery service to nearby businesses, while other teenagers are designing a web site.

These summer events marked the fourth anniversary of the launch of the Boys & Girls Club's effort to establish a youth-driven response to the needs of local young people. Starting with a dance hall skate park, organized at the National Guard Armory in 1997, and a night club, hosted at the former White Buffalo Saloon in 1998, the Boys & Girls Club has involved young people in hosting nearly 40 concert events in its 48 months of operation.

"Teens need the opportunity to express, create and explore," says Emilia C. Patrick, age 22. "These events promote creativity and independence among teenagers while showing them the benefits of taking responsibility for their actions."

Captain Nick Willick, of the Auburn Police Department, expresses his personal belief that these events "...have had a positive impact among youth in the community. They haven't created any extra police work for us, and undoubtedly saved us some."

Capt. Willick's opinion was confirmed at a recent meeting in the City Manager's Office where Sergeant Chris Reams reported that the Auburn Police Department has noticed a significant drop in youth-related problems in the downtown area. Reams attributes this in large part to the Boys & Girls Club's takeover of the Firehouse Cafe as a place for kids to congregate.

Sixteen-year-old Billy Dashiell, who was a regular summertime Firehouse Cafe customer, sees the monthly event as a good thing. "Business owners and police are always complaining about the problems created by kids who have nothing to do. These events offer us a place to go and something to do when we get there."

*Robert Tobin is the Executive Director of the Boys and Girls Club of Auburn and Melissa Bagwell is the Teen Activities Coordinator for the Club.*