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GUEST EDITORIAL

by Robert Tobin
Executive Director
Boys and Girls Club of Auburn

Making Auburn's Kids' Tomorrow Brighter

Every community wants to see its young people grow up to become productive employees, effective parents and responsible citizens.

Increasingly, families are moving to smaller towns to find the sense of belonging, usefulness and influence that all people — especially younger ones — need, to cultivate the competence, confidence and creativity that adulthood requires.

Yet, such communities find themselves hard-pressed to raise the one-to-two hundred thousand dollars needed each year to support a quality youth development program.

The result is Auburn kids' #1 complaint: boredom, the often-troublesome consequences of which are local adults' greatest concern.

Response to this problem constitutes a two-fold task. The first challenge is to establish a truly *youth-driven program*, which makes kids the subject — rather than the object — of the action intended to benefit them. The second, equally challenging task is to develop a *renewable resource base* to finance the project's ongoing operations without dependence on taxes or unpredictable outside sources.

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Our learning about youth-driven programming has been honed by the Boys & Girls Club's contact with nearly two thousand local young people over the past five years. This interaction led to our helping role in a number of innovative new programs, including the media arts apprenticeship project at A.R.T.S. and the Youth/INK newspaper page in the *Auburn Journal*.

While operating its North Auburn clubhouse, the club also pilot-tested several different programming concepts in the downtown area. These included a skate park/music venue at the National Guard Armory (4/5/96), a teen venue for the "Black & White Ball" (9/96), operation of "The Spot" (1/3/97), a "Foundation" dance concert at the Library Garden Theatre (10/97).

The fact that over 90% of the half-million dollars raised by the club in the past five years came directly from foothill residents and business owners

demonstrates our club's progress in addressing the second challenge involved in maintaining these programs.

That towns throughout the Sierra Foothills are seeking our advice addressing these challenges is a testimonial to Auburn's progress on these fronts.

As the next step toward establishing a downtown gathering place for local teenagers, the Boys & Girls Club seeks to acquire the site already identified as the ideal facility for this purpose by teenagers and nearby businesses alike.

Through our current negotiation to take over The Firehouse Cafe, we will achieve this widely-shared community dream through a compatible existing business that can self-generate three-quarters of the project's ongoing operating costs. Its location at the intersection of High Street and Lincoln Way sends the clear message that kids belong in the heart of our community. Our commitment to maintain the cafe's existing environment and customer

base preserves at least one place in our small town where boys and girls of all ages can comfortably interact.

By giving teenagers the chance to be involved in every aspect of its operation from marketing to maintenance, young people have a chance to show what they can do while learning about what they can't yet do. And, by creating this constructive environment on the high school side of the clock tower, we accomplish all this while contributing to ongoing efforts to maintain the business environment in downtown's merchant district.

In a sense, the "programming" component for this project is already in place. Every Wednesday afternoon, a dozen teenage girls currently meet quietly around a coffee table at The Firehouse Cafe. Their group, called "I.M.A.G.E." (Intelligent Minds Actively Gaining Excellence), is now working on a social event for teenagers in conjunction, fittingly enough, with the annual "Fireman's Ball." We intend to work with interested teens

and adults to develop informal interaction opportunities of this type.

Like all Auburn projects, this couldn't have happened were it not for "... those without whom ..." In this case, the difference came from the community leadership shown by Bob Haydon and his staff at Placer Savings Bank, the consistent support of the owners of the local Taco Bell franchise, the donors of our first annual Red & White Ball, and the many contributors to Placer County United Way.

Equally encouraging is the faith and trust shown by those who remained supportive during our organization's own adolescent phase, giving our club that which all children need: the chance to celebrate accomplishments and learn from mistakes.

Survival is not success in either life or work, but it is the essential first step on that pathway. We ask the community's endorsement for these next steps in a direction that makes the Auburn community a better place for us all.