

Boys and Girls Club discussed for county

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The formation of a Boys and Girls Club in Arkadelphia is in its first stages thanks to the leadership subcommittee of the Clark County Strategic Planning Committee. The subcommittee and other interested persons met Thursday afternoon with Ben Steinberg and Tim Schuringa of Southern Financial Partners. Schuringa was one of the founding board members of the Boys and Girls Club in Helena.

The Helena club has been in existence for three years, and has grown to a staff of three full-time and 10 part-time employees and more than 250 "members" or boys and girls who use the facility.

The first year's budget for the club was \$150,000. It has expanded to \$300,000 this year and will grow larger because the club is in the process of renovating a new facility.

The club's board plans to establish satellite clubs in other communities in the county within five years. "That way clubs will be available to all areas of the county," Schuringa said. "You want to reach every part of the community that you can."

Boys and Girls Clubs of America is the top youth organization in the world, Schuringa said. The clubs focus on five different core areas: Character and leadership; education and career; health and life skills; the arts; sports, fitness and recreation; and specialized initiatives, which can include computer labs, special needs programs for handicapped kids and many others.

The Helena Boys and Girls Club is open every day after school and a few hours each day during the summer. It has a game room, a gymnasium a computer lab, a crafts room and other areas. Each club can set its own hours and membership fees, Schuringa said.

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Setting the membership fee is important, he told the group. "You want to make the membership fee as nominal as possible so that everyone can be included, yet you want them to have pride in their facility. You want them to be invested in it."

All kids 6 and up are welcome to participate in activities at the club, but the programs are aimed especially to kids who are considered "at risk," he said.

To raise funds for their club, the board members used a presentation created with help from the national Boys and Girls Club organization, and showed it to every civic and community group, as well as business owners. "We had one business owner who committed to give us \$2,000 a month for the first three years," Schuringa said.

Some funding for the Helena Club was provided through the Delta Bridge Project, Phillips County's strategic planning organization.

Esthela Forte is the co-chairman of the committee. She said Max Brown has volunteered to help her chair the project. "We intend to start a really good club," Forte said.

Another meeting to discuss the issue is set for Monday. A representative of the National Boys and Girls Club will be present to answer questions. The meeting will be at 5:30 p.m. in the Caplinger Center at Henderson State University.