

THE BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB OF DECATUR FUND

A DESIGNATED ENDOWMENT FUND

By Marilyn Metzger

A group of concerned citizens, businessmen, social workers, attorneys, ministers, and law enforcement officers were led by John L. Howie, founder of Grigoleit Company, forming a steering committee that led to the organization of the Decatur Boys Club in 1972.



Richard Koehler was hired to be the first Executive Director on February 1, 1974. The building they used was a converted garage at 863 E. Leafland. By January 1974 the renovations of this garage were completed and the empty building now consisted of two offices, a craft room, a library, a games room, and a physical education room for the boys.

Working in the original facility, Walter E. Smith (Walt) became the fourth Executive Director. Walt was a 1969 graduate of Stephen Decatur High School and went on to graduate from Illinois State University, then worked for the Bloomington Parks and Recreation District for eight years before coming to the Boys Club.

The Club provides quality youth programs and activities to boys and girls between the ages of seven and seventeen. The girls' program was established in 1975. Also that year the Club became a member agency of the United Way of Decatur and Macon County. The goal of the Club is "to enhance the quality of life of youths of all backgrounds, with special concern for the disadvantage; and to develop the necessary qualities for such youth to become responsible citizens and leaders."

In 1979 Walt Smith left Decatur to work for the Department of Corrections in Hillsboro, Illinois. Fortunately for Decatur, he returned in 1982 to continue working as the Executive Director of the Boys and Girls Club, bringing back home his enthusiastic attitude and innovative ideas.

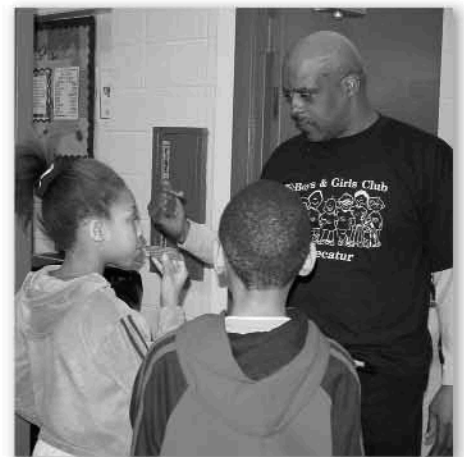
In the fall of 1983, after a successful \$1.3 million fund raising campaign, The Boys and Girls Club moved to its newly constructed, 15,000 square foot facility, at 859 N. Jasper St. "If you build it, they will come," came true; the Club membership grew from 320 boys and girls to over 1,000 members by 1985.

With quiet intensity, Walt proudly tells about a few of the successful youths who have been members of the Boys and Girls Club of Decatur. Mahan Washington, club Youth of the Year in the early 90's, wanted to be a good, professional boxer. He showed leadership skills and was a good goal setter and became a five time Illinois Golden Glove Champion. He now lives and works in Las Vegas.

David Lee, a member of the Boys and Girls Club of Decatur, went on to graduate from Southern Illinois University and returned to Decatur to do an internship in architecture at BLDD Architects, Inc.

Antonio Burton, Youth of the Year in 2001 and 2002, was honored for "Respect, Expression, Honor, Leadership, and Getting Along with People." Antonio was presented the plaque for Youth of the Year at the 30th Anniversary Dinner and Meeting of the Boys and Girls Club on November 23, 2002.

The Boys and Girls Club of Decatur receives the majority of its funds from the United Way. They receive some money from grants, and the rest is from donations from businesses and individuals. It was a Board decision early in 2003 to join The Community Foundation of Decatur/Macon County to be connected with a pool of funds that would grow and continue to provide income to the Club for years to come. The Boys and Girls Club of Decatur Endowment has grown through a series of gifts from the Douglas J. Schmalz family and matching grants from the ADM Foundation. Income from the fund is used to help pay the Club's operating expenses. Contributions can be made to the endowment either through the Boys and Girls Club at P.O. Box 744, Decatur, IL 62525, or The Community Foundation.



Walt Smith has been Executive Director of the Boys and Girls Club of Decatur since 1982.