

Camas boys and girls club receives \$1M for endowment

By Marissa Harshman
Columbian Staff Writer

Tuesday, February 2, 2010

A recent gift of \$1 million will help keep the memorial to Jack, Will and Rob Warren open and memories of the Camas boys alive.

The Community Foundation for Southwest Washington announced Monday the creation of an endowment for the Jack, Will and Rob Boys & Girls Club in Camas. The endowment was created with the donation of \$1 million from Henry "Hank" Swigert and the Swigert Foundation. Swigert was the great-uncle of the three Prune Hill boys who died in a plane crash in November 1999.

"The endowment will provide permanent support to the JWR Boys & Girls Club, just as the club itself is a permanent memorial to my great-nephews," Swigert said in a news release.

Jack, Will and Rob were 14, 13 and 9 years old, respectively, when the plane their father, William "Tiger" Warren, was flying crashed in the Columbia River. After their deaths, the boys' mother, Geri Pope Bidwell, led the fundraising effort to build the \$5.3 million club that sits behind Helen Baller Elementary School at 2033 N.E. Ione St. The club opened in 2002.

The Swigert family, who founded the steel manufacturing company ESCO Corp. in Portland, along with the Bidwell, Pope and Warren families, have pledged another \$1 million for the endowment, Swigert said in a phone interview Monday. The families decided to start the endowment when Geri Pope Bidwell moved away from the area a few years ago, Swigert said. The families wanted to find a way to ensure the club's doors never close, he said.

When fully funded at \$2 million, the Jack, Will & Rob Kids' Fund will provide a permanent source of support for about one-third of the club's annual operating needs. The club's annual operating costs are between \$350,000 and \$450,000, said Rose Rezai, resource development manager for the Boys & Girls Club of Portland Metropolitan Area, which operates the Camas club.

"In terms of the long-term stability it provides, it's definitely above and beyond the normal donation," Rezai said.

In addition to the endowment, the Boys & Girls Club of Portland Metropolitan Area has committed to providing \$100,000 in operating funds annually. Longtime Boys & Girls Club supporter and friend of the families Brot Bishop Jr., whose family founded Pendleton Woolen Mills in Washougal, has also pledged to raise \$100,000 each year from the Southwest Washington community. Donations can be mailed to JWR Boys & Girls Club, P.O. Box 820127, Portland, OR 97282.

Rooms honor boys

The Boys & Girls Club of Portland Metropolitan Area also recently entered into a five-year lease agreement with the Camas School District, which owns the property, to extend the current partnership.

The club is open to Camas and Washougal children 6 to 18 years old. An annual fee of \$5 per child provides after-school programs during the school year and afternoon programs during the summer. Last year, the center had 2,200 registered members.

The Camas center includes three rooms reflecting the Warren boys' personalities. Rob's Playhouse is a music-based room with a stage and recording studio. The technology-based Jackson Room includes Web design, graphic arts and movie-making programs. And Will's Studio houses two kilns and offers clay sculpting, painting and drawing. The center also has a gymnasium and game room.

"It's wonderful to see the interests and talents of Jack, Will and Rob live on in the many children who learn and grow through the club," Swigert said.

Marissa Harshman: 360-735-4546 or marissa.harshman@columbian.com.

Comments