

Suffolk steps up to renovate Boys & Girls Clubs facility

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Suffolk Construction CEO John Fish put his firm to work on the renovation of the now-44,000-square-foot Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston facility.

With late fall weather and early nightfall driving them indoors, children and teens from some of Boston's tougher neighborhoods are enjoying the brightly lit, newly renovated Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston's Yawkey Club of Roxbury -- in large part due to the generosity of a prominent construction company and its CEO.

Renovations at the now-44,000-square-foot facility on Warren Street, formerly the Roxbury Club, were long overdue. The club had not changed much since it moved to the site in 1968.

"Other than the pool and the gym, none of the spaces worked well," said Lisa Lewis, Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston project manager. "So the organization made the decision to do more renovation. Then we started planning."

Boys & Girls Clubs had planned to work with another contractor, but the work threatened to go beyond the budget set by the nonprofit for the project.

"We had to figure out what to do," Lewis said.

Then John Fish and Suffolk Construction Co. Inc. stepped in.

Fish had been a member of BGCB's board of directors for three years, and he had already made a \$250,000 cash donation earmarked for the renovation project. Active in the Roxbury community in which Suffolk is located, he and his company support the Greater Boston Food Bank, the Reggie Lewis Track & Athletic Center, Boston Medical Center and many other local organizations.

"We were aware that the Roxbury club had some challenges physically," Fish said. "I knew that the Boys & Girls Clubs had engaged an architect, The Architectural Team Inc., and they had engaged another contractor. They were having some budget challenges. Because of our desire help the youth of the city, I approached the Boys & Girls Clubs and asked them for an opportunity to look at the

project from a budget point of view. Once we knew we could assist them from a budget point of view, we had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to directly impact the community and the children."

Fish stepped down from the organization's board and took the job. He also committed a total of \$1 million, much of it in in-kind donations, to the project.

"We believe that the management of the Boys & Girls Clubs offers the strongest programs to help youth in the city. Linda Whitlock is the most charismatic, dynamic leader I've met in the city of Boston," said Fish, referring to the president and CEO of Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston. "She's one of a kind. She was the prime reason we made that commitment."

"It was a major gut renovation," Fish said. "Our organization didn't look at this from a risk perspective. We viewed it from an opportunity perspective. We knew as a company what we were getting into. The challenge was to make the numbers work."

The new club, which celebrated its grand reopening in September, has room for 300 new members.

"We couldn't wait for the change," said Andrea Swain, the executive director of the Roxbury facility. "The last year we had been off-site in outdated school buildings. We welcomed coming to a bright, sunny clubhouse. We're overjoyed."