

# West Salem Coulee News Online

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## Boys & Girls Club opens on Monday

By MATTHEW PERENCHIO | Assistant editor

It's been four years in the making, and now the West Salem Boys & Girls Club is ready.

The club will officially open its doors on Monday, July 16. A number of activities are already planned, but interim site director Sarah Wendland hopes area youth bring some ideas in addition to themselves.

"This is their club, and we want them to know that," Wendland said. "The kids do have a say in what goes on. We want to take on ideas from the kids and do things they want to do."

The WSBGC, located at 134 N. Leonard St., will take on summer hours of 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. The club is open to all West Salem area youth ages 7 to 18; annual membership is \$10, and scholarships are available for those who cannot afford the cost.

Wendland said membership information will be available to anyone who stops in, but she said she simply wants people to come and check out the new facility.

"We just want to get kids in here to show what we're all about," Wendland said. "Kids, parents — everyone is invited to come on in, look around and see what we have to offer."

For the last four years, a local Boys & Girls Club has been a vision of the Village People, a non-profit strategic planning group that aims to revitalize downtown West Salem. The group early on identified youth as one of its focus points, and they wanted to provide them with some type of safe, recreational opportunity. Following surveys, studies and community-wide discussion, the Boys & Girls Club was made one of the group's top priorities.

Don Brenengen, president of the Village People Youth Committee, said the opening of the club was



**Interim site director Sarah Wendland was busy last week setting up games in anticipation of the opening of the West Salem Boys & Girls Club on Monday.**

Photo by Matthew Perenchio

a community-driven effort and it is very meaningful to finally see it finished.

"It's hard to express," he said. "Some of the kids even came in to help with painting (and) putting things together. To hear their laughter in the building when they're in there — it's hard to put into words."

When the new club opens on Monday, the Village People will officially hand over its responsibility of the facility. A local advisory board will take on oversight of the WSBGC, and it will become part of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater

La Crosse — the seventh club in the group.

"As we consider ourselves the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater La Crosse, we want to be able to serve the greater

La Crosse community, and we think West Salem is a great step in that direction," said Kevin Johnston, executive director of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater La Crosse. "When the doors open, the best time we're going to have is when those kids are walking through those doors."

Both Brenengen and Johnston said they extend a thank-you to the many people who helped make the West Salem club a possibility — from volunteers to businesses to donors. They said they also appreciated the support of Franciscan Skemp, which is leasing the building for \$1 a year for the club after closing the former West Salem Clinic last fall.

"We need to thank the volunteers from the West Salem area — especially the youth committee of the Village People of West Salem," Johnston said. "Without their cooperation and leadership, this all would not be possible."

The West Salem club will have facilities that will offer numerous services and programs, including art, music, theater, tutoring, cooking, basketball and Internet access. Some upcoming events offered include trips to the swimming pool and Fort McCoy, bike rides and sports and mentoring programs. Plus, the club's Teen Center walls are in need of some creative minds and youth are invited to help create a mural.

Brenengen, who will serve on the West Salem club's advisory board, said one of the first goals is to mold programming into what best matches the kids' needs.

"Even though we surveyed the kids' wants and needs and accommodated for that, now we want to put it into play and see how it works," he said. "We'll constantly modify what we're doing based on what the kids want and need."

Wendland also noted the club is looking for volunteers to help at the facility. In addition to a full-time director, the club currently has five part-time workers but will need additional help. She said volunteers should be at least 16 years old and schedules are flexible. Those interested in volunteering at the club can pick up an application.

While Brenengen said the Village People will now move their attention toward other projects, the group will still lend a hand to the WSBGC when needed, such as with fundraisers. He noted that about \$540,000 has been raised of the committee's \$600,000 goal for three years of the club's operating budget as well as an endowment to help defray future funding. But he noted there are additional events going on this fall that will raise money for the club, such as a street dance, a poker run and a golf outing.

Wendland said there is an air of excitement at the club and there is much anticipation to open and begin greeting area youth.

"We're anxious to get the doors open," she said. "We're excited to see the smiles on their faces."

- **ON THE WEB:** For more information on the West Salem Boys & Girls Club or to see what additional supplies are needed, log onto [www.wsbgc.org](http://www.wsbgc.org).

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