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WALTON, BRADY TEAM FOR BOYS/GIRLS CLUB

Funds given, being raised for new facility in La Mesa

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One grew up in La Mesa and went on to become a successful businessman and philanthropist.

The other also grew up in La Mesa and became famous — enormously famous — on the basketball court.

Both understand how important it is for children and teenagers to have supportive adults steering them toward learning and fitness, and away from unsupervised afternoons where they might dawdle or get into trouble.

Now NBA legend Bill Walton and businessman Ron Brady are teaming up for La Mesa, to contribute something they see as vital for the city's future: a safe and happy place for its children.

They're raising funds for a new 25,000-square-foot La Mesa Boys & Girls Club, which is planned on the grounds of the La Mesa Middle School and which will become East County's sixth Boys & Girls Club branch, and its flagship facility.

The project, which will take several years to build after fundraising is complete, has a budget of \$8.9 million. Mary Alice and Ron Brady pledged \$3 million, part of which will go toward updating the adjacent teen center and part of which will fund the clubhouse.

As for where the rest of the funds will come from? That's where Walton comes in. Walton is lending his name and connections to help with fundraising. He assembled a list of noteworthy friends — including Magic Johnson, Tony Hawk and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar — who are joining him in lending support for the project. They've signed a letter to the community that outlines why the project is important to La Mesa.

La Mesa Mayor Art Madrid said the Boys & Girls Club's focus on homework and after-school activities is valuable for children as well as parents and, as an extension of those stimulated and safely supervised kids, for the broader community.

"As far as I'm concerned, this is probably one of the best things that could happen to La Mesa," Madrid said. The location, near an elementary school, at the middle school is ideal, he said. "I am absolutely ecstatic they are coming."

Jerry Fazio, executive director of the East County Boys & Girls Club Foundation, said the center will have room and programs for approximately 400 children every day.

Services will feature the Boys & Girls Clubs' trademark mix of after school programs, health and fitness services, and academic support. He cited three of its planned programs:

- Power Hour, where tutors spend an hour looking over kids' homework, checking for correct answers and neatness.

- Healthy dinners, which will especially help the area's poorest children.

- An anti-obesity program, to invest in children's long-term health.

Fazio said he was grateful for the Bradys' contributions. "He is the most enthusiastic and most generous guys I've ever met," he said of Ron Brady.

Brady, in turn, offered two words of wisdom when it comes to educating children: "Kids don't care what you know, until they know that you care." Here's one more: "My saying has always been that it's better to build kids than try to mend adults. (It's) a lot more effective."

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