

How the Valley of the Moon Teen Center Got Built
Or
It truly does take a village

The story of the Teen Center is a story of about angels appearing, again and again, to help us overcome obstacles in our way. The story began in the Spring of 2002. At that time, I, Art Fichtenberg, was a 2-year board member, and then current chair of the Sonoma County Community Development Committee. It was then that I was approached by the then current Executive Director, Lyn Sherard- Stuhr, with a request to locate land that we could purchase to build a new center.

She had heard of grant money available through Sonoma County Parks and Recreation Dept. to fund capital projects, such as a teen center. I was aware of funding available through the Redevelopment Agency for various infrastructure costs, so it looked like the funding might be available to make most of this happen. But only if we could find the land at a reasonable price, owned by someone was willing to support our efforts by being willing to accommodate the very lengthy time-consuming process we needed to follow to obtain the funding we were seeking

We found such a seller, Eric Glunt, our first angel, who was willing to wait almost 2 years to close the sale without raising the price. Due to his patience we were allowed the time to obtain financing from the Sonoma County Community Development Commission to fund 50% of the purchase, \$70,000, and \$10,000 for estimated environmental costs. When those estimated environment costs turned out to be in excess of \$20,000, Steve Cox, (Angel 2) and Winzler and Kelly Consulting Engineers, worked at reduced costs, or pro bono, to bring the work in on budget.

The other \$70,000 was donated by local business people and valley residents, Arthur Fichtenberg, Neils Chew, Steve Cox, Cynthia Wood, and Cathy Wade Shepard (angels 3 thru 9) along with the estate of the late Julia Leven (angel 10)

Julia Leaven was an avid supporter of children and thru the guidance of Financial Advisor, Lillian Meyers, a then current board member) (angel 11), the teen center was a recipient of a very large bequest. It was that occurrence that gave the center the financial resources it needed to underwrite the building effort. With this act, Lillian and Julia provided a huge service to the teens and their supporters. The valley teens and the community will benefit from their generosity.

During the process of obtaining funding from various governmental agencies, a need emerged for a very competent person to handle the processing of all the paperwork and funding activities. It was then, in 2003, that retired commercial banker, Jean Hopeman joined the team (angel 12). Jean has served on the construction committee from then to now, providing help and guidance with her great organizational skills and huge heart.

It was at the very beginning of my efforts to form a team that local architect, Garry Baker signed up. He was our first volunteer of the effort. (angel 13) Without his pro bono architectural efforts we would not have been able to obtain the funding we did with the land donors, and later, the governmental agencies.

Ultimately, we were approved for total project funding from The Sonoma County Partnership for Youth \$417,825, Sonoma County Community Development Commission's Community Development Block Grants \$290,000 and the Sonoma Valley Redevelopment Agency, \$235,000. During the long and sometimes very frustrating process we always very kindly supported by Kathleen Kane, Executive Director of the Community Development Commission and her staff, as well as Supervisor, Valerie Brown, and her staff.

During this time, we formed connections with La Luz, the Mentoring Alliance, the Sonoma Community Center, the Springs Unity Partnership, and Vintage House to work together toward common goals, and to consider the new Teen Center to be a resource to reach those goals. It was envisioned that offices at the center could be available to other non-profit and community groups needing meeting or office space. We also envisioned a community kitchen to serve both the teens educational and nutritional needs, the community's needs, and to be a source of revenue.

After the land purchase in June, 2004, we spent the next two years to create plans and obtain approvals, which was led by Garry Baker, Architect. Eventually, in October, 2006, we submitted construction plans for approval. At that time, we started obtaining bids, etc.

A fund-raising committee, which was started in 2003 was rejuvenated in 2006 to raise the community capital needed once our plans were approved. Joining the major funding committee were many of the above referred to angels, as well as new angels, ---well-known community-supporters, Kathy Mazza and Whitney Evans, (angels 14 and 15) Through their guidance and our collective efforts we were able to raise \$150,000 in cash, including major contributions from, Rotary of Sonoma Valley (\$10,000); Sonoma Valley Bank, \$10,000; August Sebastiani Foundation, (\$25,000); and The Williamson Family Foundation (\$25,000).

In the fall of 2006, two more very skilled and effective professionals joined our construction committee, Jere Starks from Infineon Raceway, and Stefanie Shackelford, from Odyssey Travel (Angel 16 and 17). Stefanie brought energy and effectiveness to the committee, willing to take on any task, and always got it done. Many items we originally expected to pay for, she was able to find at reduced, or no, cost. She was invaluable.

Jere's addition to our team brought a huge amount of construction knowledge and connections to our effort. Through his experience as the head of construction for Infineon Raceway, his energy, and his commitment to the project, and the tremendous

support we received from Infineon, we were able to address challenges and overcome hurdles.

In the fall 2006 we received the construction estimates for the project which were double what had been projected, and the project looked doomed. The beautiful building that Gary had designed for us was estimated to cost over \$1.4 million and we budgeted \$700k.

Facing such a problem, we held a well attended meeting of community leaders to ask for guidance and support. Those in attendance affirmed the need for our project and offered support in various ways. As a result of that, and subsequent community meetings, a new vision emerged for a more modest, factory-built building at a substantially reduced costs (\$1,00,000 m/l). We decided to raise more money, and have Garry create a look for this modular building of which we could be proud.

Although the cost had been reduced by 40%, it was still way over our budget. This was overcome primarily by the efforts of one man, Jere Starks of Infineon. Through his efforts we obtained a \$100,000 grant from the members of the Engineering Contractors Association of Northern California (angel 18) and funding for the rest of the site donated from Ghilotti Construction and many others, the value of which was more than \$200,000 (angel 19). Additionally, Infineon (angel 20) donated thousands of dollars worth time and material to reduce our costs. Time and again, every time we hit a cost increase, Jere found some way to reduce our costs. Once the brick tile sales are completed, we will be completely funded, with contingencies, start up costs, and initial operations costs funded outside of ongoing teen operations.

With our funding back into balance, we proceeded with obtaining permits, executing contracts, ordering buildings, and commenced construction in September, 2007. Construction is expected to be completed by June 30, 2008.

During the construction phase, both Jere Starks and Gary Baker, supported by Stefanie Shackaford, were constantly on the site, solving problems, working with subcontractors, dealing with government, and a million other things. Jean Hopeman served as our organizational leader, keeping things on track and accounted for, keeping the books, interfacing with our government funders, our contractor's invoices, and ourselves. Art Fichtenberg served as the point of contact with the contractors regarding contracts, change orders, contracts, chair the committee, and try to keep things coordinated. Together, we have worked as a fabulous team.

The building is expected to be completed by June 15, 2008, and it is a community building effort in which we can take great pride.

Please be aware the angels to whom I gave just one number, such as the Engineering Contractors Association of Northern California, Ghilotti Construction, and Infineon Raceway, really include many individual businesses and persons who donated their labor, time and equipment to make this happen.

Thanks to all.