

Big Brothers/Big Sisters unveils new office space

By **Jennifer DeWitt**

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Bonnie Leinart, longtime supporter of Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS), cuts the ribbon Tuesday, Dec. 7, to mark the grand opening of BBBS' new Quad Cities Mentoring Center in Davenport.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Mississippi Valley (BBBS) celebrated Tuesday, Dec. 7, completing its spacious, modern office space where it plans to inspire children for years to come to achieve their full potential.

During a grand opening of its new Quad Cities Mentoring Center, located at 3247 E. 35th St. Court in Davenport, the youth organization thanked its staff, board, donors, construction team, volunteers and families for their role in pushing the project — two years in the making — to a successful finish.

“Our board’s interest in looking at the future long-term for our organization put the wheels in motion to be here today,” Jay Justin, the mentoring organization’s president and CEO, told a crowd of more than 80 BBBS supporters on hand. “It’s bigger than what we need now, but this will be enough space to hold us for at least another 20 years,” Mr. Justin said as guests lined the walls of an expansive, open floorplan gathering space to be used for programming.

Visitors marveled at the 10,000-square-foot of renovated office space — twice BBBS’ previous space. Mr. Justin credited the modern space and amenities to Mel Foster Co., whose generous donation provides the space rent-free to BBBS for years to come. Located in the Mel Foster office complex near Elmore and Kimberly roads, the office space once housed United Way Quad Cities.

Travis Guy, the BBBS board chair, shared much of the credit for the project with Lynsey Engels, president of Mel Foster’s Real Estate Brokerage, as well as the rest of the Fick family. “A lot of people in this room got us to the finish line,” said Mr. Guy of Modern Woodmen of America.

The expanded space is expected to allow BBBS to grow from serving about 600 youth a year to 1,000 annually in the next decade.

“This was definitely a group effort. It was an organization that we could identify with to come into the space up here and form a longtime partnership with,” said Ms. Engels, a BBBS board member for the past three years. She noted how her

brother Ryan Fick, vice president of Mel Foster Properties in Iowa, had brokered the deal through a long, complicated process. “It’s great we hit the finish line this year when Mel Foster is marking its 100th year,” Ms. Engels said.

The new location, which opened months ago, replaces BBBS’s former downtown Davenport office, sold to the neighboring St. Anthony’s Catholic Church for use as its new religious education center.

In addition to having a new facility for staff and the families it serves, Mr. Justin said the move also scored another win as BBBS used all the sale proceeds of its former building to establish an endowment fund. In addition, thanks to a lead gift of \$100,000 from John and Bonnie Leinart for the Potential in Youth capital campaign, BBBS raised more than \$375,000 to cover renovation costs.

Ms. Leinart, a longtime BBBS supporter and board member had the honor of snipping the ribbon during a ribbon-cutting ceremony hosted by the Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce. Her husband completed his 22nd year on the BBBS board earlier this year.

Jim Kiesey, senior director of operations for Estes Construction, Davenport, said the building’s redesign and renovations were just the project’s first phase. Phase two, he added, would bring imaging and new branding to BBBS, as well as more amenities, including a remodeled patio and interior programming space. “We were able to leverage relationships with many community partners. The list is long and distinguished.”

Among the campaign investors: John and Bonnie Leinart, Scott County Regional Authority, Hunt and Diane Harris, Modern Woodmen of America, Regional Development Authority, Ascentra Credit Union, MidAmerican Energy, Quad City Bank & Trust, Mel Foster Co., BITCO, Jay and Mary Justin, Ellen Bluth, and Doug and Nancy Hultquist.

The new facility increases the organization’s footprint. It provides several new amenities, including three private interview rooms, a large meeting room, a resource room with support materials and space for match introductions, expanded offices, ample off-street parking and increased records/materials storage.

“We’re so excited about what this facility means to our future,” Mr. Justin told the crowd.