

July 1, 2019

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Four organizations merge to form Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Ohio

In a move designed to strengthen and grow organizations serving nearly 8,500 kids in four counties, the governing boards of four Northeast Ohio Boys & Girls Clubs have agreed to merge.

Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland, Erie County, Lorain County and the Western Reserve (Akron) have merged to form Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Ohio (BGCNEO). The Clubs, which will maintain their separate organizational identities, have 36 sites between them and a total budget of about \$11 million.

The merger takes effect today. It is one of the largest of its type in the country.

Ron Soeder, who has headed Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland for the past 13 years, has been named interim president and CEO of the new organization. He will remain in that role while the organization and the parent Boys & Girls Clubs of America search for a permanent leader.

The new organization will be governed by a board with representatives from all four Clubs and the local boards will shift to an advisory role primarily focused on strategy and community needs. According to Soeder, each local Club will retain its identity, and donors will be able to direct their funds to local Clubs specifically or to the region.

“This merger gives us the opportunity to serve more kids and develop deeper programming,” Soeder said. “All four of the merging Club are financially strong and well-run, and combining our forces will enable us to scale our best practices, streamline operations and be more cost-efficient – all to serve and support more kids. “

Soeder said there are no plans for layoffs and that the merger may actually help fill existing vacancies. The four merging Clubs together have 334 employees, 87 of whom are full-time workers.

New BGCNEO board officers and their Club affiliations are Rich Desich, president (Lorain County); Leslie Murray, vice president (Erie County); Mark Bachmann, secretary (Cleveland); and Derrick Ransom Jr., treasurer (Western Reserve).

"I am really proud of the tremendous effort our four organizations have put forth in becoming Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Ohio," Desich said. "We have a fantastic local team that really benefitted from guidance and leadership from the Boys & Girls Clubs of America. I am very excited about our vision for the future and how we as a collective team will make an even greater impact for the children of Northeast Ohio."

Murray said, "By integrating our local Club with the other area Clubs in Northeast Ohio, we are bringing much-needed resources and opportunities to our kids. These resources will provide a deeper and richer experience for the kids we are currently serving and will allow us to grow to serve even more kids in our community."

"The Cleveland Clubs provide a safe place where kids can flourish," Bachmann said. "Our 13 Clubs are saving the kids most at risk in Cleveland. This merger will allow us to serve even more kids in our neighborhood, with deeper impact."

Ransom said, "We firmly believe this merger presents a great opportunity to expand and serve the many areas of need in greater Akron and throughout our Northeast Ohio community."

Two BGCC subsidiaries will also join BGCNEO under the merger and retain their current board structures. They are Cleveland Peacemakers Alliance, which works to stem violence in the city, and Open Arts, formerly known as Open Tone Music, which provides music, art, dance and theater programming.

Boys & Girls Clubs of America has been encouraging mergers throughout the country in order to boost membership, standardize programming and bolster the financial standing of individual Clubs. BGCA has committed to investing \$350,000 in the Northeast Ohio merger effort.

A study of Clubs that have merged in the past five years showed those organizations saw a 21 percent increase in the number of youth served and a 29 percent increase in total revenue.

Boys & Girls Clubs provide safe, fun places for kids ages 6-18 to go after school. The Clubs focus on academic achievement, healthy lifestyles and character development. The Clubs' youth development professionals provide programming that includes arts, athletics and homework help.

### **A brief history of the Clubs**

***Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland:*** In 1954, the first Boys Club opened on Broadway Avenue in Cleveland's Slavic Village neighborhood. It was established by a group of corporate executives from Republic Steel (now ArcelorMittal) and Cliffs Natural Resources. The second Cleveland Club opened in the Mount Pleasant Neighborhood in 1972. In 1976, the Boys Clubs of Cleveland took a step that earned it distinction as a national thought leader. It began to accept girls as members and became the Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland. This progressive step occurred a full 14 years before the national organization became the Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

**Boys & Girls Clubs of the Western Reserve:** Boys & Girls Clubs of the Western Reserve has a unique place in the history of the Boys & Girls Clubs movement. The organization began in 1984 as the Boys & Girls Club of Summit County and was one of three selected urban sites participating in a national demonstration project to test the feasibility of bringing Club programs into low-income housing areas designated by Boys Clubs of America and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The program was a success and there are more than 400 Clubs in housing projects across the country.

**Boys & Girls Clubs of Lorain County:** Boys & Girls Clubs of Lorain County has been serving the community's youth since 1999, when current Executive Director Mike Conibear transformed a small space within an Oberlin city school building into a Club for kids. Since then, the organization has expanded to become one of the largest youth-serving agencies in the Northeast Ohio.

**Boys & Girls Clubs of Erie County:** In 1998, Boys & Girls Club of Erie County began as a project of Leadership Erie County, a nonprofit, service-oriented organization that prepares civic-minded individuals through training to serve their communities. The group decided that an after-school program for youth was needed in the community and began researching the Boys & Girls Club of America. On July 4, 1998, the Boys & Girls Club of Erie County was established and opened its doors at the First United Congregational Church of Christ. In 2010, the late Ruth F. Parker suggested BGCEC use her property on Cleveland Road to open a teen center; she later donated the building to the Club.

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