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Boys & Girls Club gets big boost

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The generosity of some businesses and organizations is bringing needed improvements to the Ben Arnold Boys & Girls Club.

The improvements at the facility, just off Rosewood Drive in Columbia, include a new interior paint job and the installation of a commercial-grade kitchen.

"We are grateful to all of the partners that helped bring this phase of our renovation to a completion," said Carter Clark, president of the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Midlands, of which the Ben Arnold Club is a unit.

"This is a second home for many of our members, and we wanted it to reflect how much we care for them."

Paint was donated by Lowe's and Olympic Paint, and the city of Columbia Parks and Recreation Department, which owns the building, supplied the painters. That work was recently finished.

The upgraded kitchen, with appliances furnished by the Excel Foundation, is tentatively scheduled for completion by the end of December.

The kitchen will help in providing meals for club participants, as well as expand service projects that the club's young participants are involved in - among those, a recent drive for soldiers serving overseas and an upcoming holiday canned food drive.

"Along with the other service projects that we do, the kitchen will help us do other things like cook meals for local elderly," said Avril Lail, area director of the Boys & Girls Club of the Midlands. "It will also help better provide meals for the kids who come to Ben Arnold.

"We're really excited about what's going on here."

The Ben Arnold location serves between 45 and 50 children from kindergarten through high school weekdays after school.

Along with snacks and homework help, children participate in activities that cover five core areas stressed by the Boys & Girls Clubs: character and leadership development, education and career development, health and life skills, fine arts, and sports and recreation.

Lail has seen the daily number of participants at the Ben Arnold location grow over the years, and she expects that trend will continue.

"For some kids, we used to be a gym and that's it," Lail said. "But more and more we've seen the numbers of kids who come here grow, and I think the renovations will help continue that trend."

For Clark, the renovations aren't just about improving the building.

"A lot of adults put in a lot of effort to create an environment that let's our kids know they are special," Clark said.

"It may seem like only paint and lighting, but this renovation project actually is telling the children that they are deserving of nice surroundings. For some kids, that means a ton."

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