



PHOTO: TOM SPITZ

From left - Daniel Miranda, Club House Director; Jacob Ariana; Linda Wojtowicz, CEO, Boys and Girls Club; Goel Ellis, 2015 Mark Irvin City Youth of the Year; Mark Irvin, 2015 Jim Click for Kids Award honoree; Ale Jordan

Mark Irvin's Passion

Boys & Girls Clubs of Tucson

By Christy Krueger

When Mark Irvin joined the Boys & Girls Clubs of Tucson board of directors in 1990, the group had only one clubhouse. Now there are six. He created or co-chaired The Event, The Party, Youth of the Year, numerous other programs and fundraisers – and the Click for Kids Award.

After years of giving, Irvin, managing member of Mark Irvin Commercial Real Estate Services, is now getting back in the form of the award he helped create in 2009. He's a good friend of every previous recipient, he gave the eulogy for one and he presented the award to three.

His reaction to being on the receiving end: "This is the first time it's not being given to one of my nominees."

The Click for Kids Award is presented to a person, couple, group or organization that has had a significant impact on the Boys & Girls Clubs kids for a significant period of time.

"I never created it with the thought of getting it. I know all these amazing people so I thought it was great to create," Irvin said. The first year's award went to its namesake, Jim Click, and five other awards were presented before Irvin – Bill Dawson (2010), Rusty and Mary Garrett (2011), Jon and Heather Volpe (2012), David Lovitt (2013), and Jana Westerbeke and Pam McNair-Wingate (2014).

Irvin moved to Tucson in 1986. He spent a significant amount of time familiarizing himself with the community and assessing what causes he'd like to support. "I interviewed about 10 non-profit agencies, all dedicated to helping kids. I fell in love with Bill Dawson," the Boys & Girls Clubs director at the time. Dawson retired in 2010 and passed away in 2014.

In addition to his family, his business and fly-fishing in all parts of the world, Irvin's big love is BGCT. The dozens of pictures, plaques and articles adorning

his office walls attest to this.

So can fellow board member Westerbeke, co-president of Gadabout SalonSpas. "The passion Mark shares is contagious and he encourages all around him to give more, to be more and to reach deeper than you ever thought you could," Westerbeke said.

As new clubhouses were built and existing ones renovated, Irvin was in charge of site selection, contract negotiations and working with the city and school districts. But it was his fundraising and attention to the kids that get the most remarks.

"I have known Mark for many years and his commitment to the children in this community has been unwavering," said Jon Volpe, CEO of NOVA Home Loans. "The amazing thing about Mark is that he isn't just in the boardroom. He goes to the clubs to play basketball and foosball with the kids and to mentor as many as he can."

Click added, "He took the board to an all-new level with his enthusiasm and board recruitment. He raised a million dollars at The Auction. When Mark does something, he does it 125 percent. He's a Super Bowl champ as far as I'm concerned."

Lorraine Morgan, VP of communications and fund development for BGCT, remembered a dire situation a few years ago when Irvin came to the rescue.

"In 2009 we had to eliminate the basketball league as a cost-cutting measure," Morgan said. "It was a huge chunk of our annual budget with about 2,000 club members in basketball. Mark had a relationship with Rollin' for Niños, which is concerned about underserved youth and supporting athletics. Mark spearheaded an effort to meet with them and they agreed to give \$50,000 a year for five years, starting in 2010, so we could re-establish the basketball league."

Longtime board member and past Click for Kids recipient Lovitt, of D.M. Lovitt Insurance Agency, believes Irvin's recognition is long overdue. "I can't say enough about Mark as far as time and effort and money he's given to the clubs. He has far surpassed anybody. He's raised more money than anyone. He is Mr. Boys & Girls Clubs."

Irvin wore that title especially well when Dawson's successor, Armando Rios, left in mid-2013. Irvin volunteered to be interim CEO until the board found a replacement in Linda Wojtowicz.

"He was an unpaid CEO for seven months," Lovitt said. "He got me to be chair of the search committee and he called me every other day to see if we'd found somebody. He's the greatest board member and a real champion of our Boys & Girls Clubs."

What's been most eye-opening to Irvin during his time with BGCT is seeing the degree of need in our community. "I'm always shocked that 20 percent of kids here live below the poverty level – and I'm amazed what Boys & Girls Clubs can do working with schools. It takes a lot of people who care. As a club we can't do it all alone."

During the official presentation of the Click for Kids Award in June, the honoree will surely see a room filled with people who care – about the kids and about their friend Mark Irvin.

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