

Armenian American Veteran's Building: Community Participation for the Future

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Our St. John Veteran's Building is a total community center, serving our greater Armenian Community. Generations of our Detroit Metro area Armenian Community have attended sporting events, played cards and tavloo, participated in Tuesday Lunch Club, rehearsal dinners, day camp, birthday and graduation parties, social get togethers and even church! All because a group of Armenian American Veterans returning from giving service to our country and the world, believed that they could and should do more. So, the idea of a community center was born on Oakman Boulevard.

Our Veteran's Building has been through several renovations and expansions. First, the building was built and as is our custom, with no mortgage. Improvements were made along the way until the gym was reborn from a basement into the gym we use today. Racquet ball courts and community rooms, including an ACYOA Room, took over the space we once called the gym. And so, it went on. The AGBU Manoogian School also rents the gym Monday through Friday throughout the school year. The Orthodox Youth Association also rents our facilities throughout their season of basketball, in which our youth also participate. This year, our men's Orthodox team won first place in the final tournament game for the second year in a row. Half of the team, now young adult men into their careers, flew in for the tournament. The bond that forms in that building is everlasting.

For the past few years, our center has begun to show its age. The St. John Apostolic Society graciously and generously dug up the leaking foundation and made it new while also putting on a new, leak proof roof. Now, it's up to us, the community that has its heart and memories in those walls, to fix the rest. It's our turn.

One donor made the gym possible for our ACYOA to host Sports Weekend held over Memorial Weekend, with Detroit pride. The gym and entry way sparkled. But that's not the end. All the community rooms need love and the kitchen should at least be fresh and efficient. The card room, the hall, the entry and yes, those bathrooms are all in serious need of renovation.

Some very generous gifts have been made. What more do we need? Our goal is \$500,000. We began with an open house and a very short presentation, accompanied by pizza, to allow our community to see the building, up, down and sideways, to show the gravity of the situation. Our day camp uses the building all summer and we want the children of our community to have a fresh and clean facility that plays host to them, creating the same bonds that have endured for the rest of us.

Now that ACYOA Sports Weekend has passed, we can begin serious fund raising in earnest. First, following the gifts already received, we will be having small gatherings hosted by members of our community that look to help provide the memories of the future.

We have day camp, we have athletics, we have Arts of Armenia, we have health fairs, we have social rooms, and we have Tuesday Lunch Club. When you are called, think back and then, think forward, just like our Armenian American Veteran's did for us. It's our turn to make it better than we found it.