



Utilizing to serve

MAM takes advantage of existing infrastructure

BY ANNE CHAMBERS
Special to My Life



Children embrace the new skateboard ramp in the MAM Greenlaw Center, a former City of Memphis community center. MAM partnered with Skatelite Memphis to build the ramp and provide skateboards, helmets and pads to the youth. Skateboarding is just one of the new programs offered by MAM to underprivileged youth at the former community center.

It was the year 2001 and **Memphis Athletic Ministries (MAM)** was at a crossroads with its need for more space to serve a large population of at-risk urban youth. **MAM** uses organized sports to share and model Christ to at-risk youth ages 6 to 18 in disadvantaged urban Memphis neighborhoods.

"We were 'going green' before green was in," states **Gib Vestal, MAM's chief executive officer**. "Our goal in the early days of MAM was to tap into all available resources -- churches, schools, other youth organizations -- that allowed us to deepen our penetration into the inner city and reach more kids. Using existing infrastructure and creating sustainability just became part of our plan as we found more and more underutilized buildings in underserved neighborhoods that met our programming needs."

And with the exception of the Memphis Grizzlies Center off North Airways, MAM remains true to its strategy of utilizing existing facilities in economically challenged areas of Memphis, then implementing life-changing programs, and ultimately turning these facilities into vital centers within the communities they serve.

MAM centers are also strategically located close to schools and in neighborhoods so that the youth can safely walk to their neighborhood facility another "green" benefit that saves transportation costs, lessens pollution, and invites more youth into MAM centers.

Ten MAM neighborhood youth centers and the MAM Park Golf Course are the results of community partnerships. Four churches (Whitehaven United Methodist Church, Brinkley Heights Baptist Church, Olivet Fellowship Baptist Church and Sacred Heart Catholic Church), one Christian community group (The Salvation Army), and one school (New Hope Christian Academy) provide the buildings and MAM provides the staff and youth mentoring programs at each of these facilities. MAM Park Golf Course is leased from the City of Memphis.

Most recently MAM continued its philosophy of "staying green" by expanding its mentoring and academic enrichment programs to four City of Memphis community centers are now occupied with youth participating in structured activities after school and further than just recycling buildings.

"Once we are in a facility, we look for ways to efficiently operate that building. One of our first priorities when we started our relationship with Whitehaven United Methodist Church was to upgrade its gym's HVAC system to be energy efficient. With generous funding from several local supporters, this new heating and cooling system made the MAM Whitehaven center much more attractive to neighborhood youth," says **James Armfield, president and chief operating officer**. "And the new system cut down tremendously on energy usage as well as our utility bills."

"When we expand our mission to a new location, we want to find a meaningful use for every bit of space that has been entrusted to us, not just the gym," states **Randy Odom, community director**. "Our first goal is to add a computer lab so our kids can have computer access away from school for homework as well as for their participation in our academic program. Then we use other empty spaces for game rooms and Bible study rooms for small groups in order to create a safe and secure place for the kids to hang with their peers and mentors. Utilization of donated computers, monitors, TVs and furniture extends the productive life of these items and this benefits our community and reduces the demand for landfills."

To learn more about MAM, go to mamsports.org.



Youth at the MAM Whitehaven Center are thankful for the energy efficient HVAC system that makes the facility a safe and comfortable haven after school and on Saturdays. From left to right – Darrell Bell, Lecharles Boddie, Rajah Brown, MAM neighborhood director, Rod Hinton, MAM assistant neighborhood director, Jon Walker, and Stanley Smith