Gallup Youth Boxing Program keeps area kids on track

Written by By Rick Abasta Sun Correspondent
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For more than 20 years, the Gallup Youth Boxing Program has been providing the community with free training in basic boxing techniques. The program began as a part of the New Mexico Police Athletic League.

When the state PAL folded a few years ago, the volunteer trainers, Chuck Padilla and Frank Diaz, struggled to keep the program afloat. Having a facility to operate the program was the biggest concern.

Support from the city now has the program under Gallup Parks and Recreation Department. The boxing program is headquartered at the former fire station on the north side of town at 204 W. Maloney Ave.

Most recently, the building was home to the non-profit veterans organization, Brothers in Arms. The Veterans Helping Veterans mural is still proudly displayed on the building edifice and is a fitting tribute the trainers (both combat vets) volunteering to teach the kids.

Mayor Jackie McKinney said he was a member of the board when the boxing program was still funded by PAL about 10 years ago.

McKinney explained that he wanted to continue the program because of the positive impact it's had on the community's youth.

"(The city) received legislative appropriation to setup the program in Gallup and to buy the boxing ring," he said. "It's a very professional boxing ring."

Padilla agrees the training has positive outcomes, and has volunteered his time to the program for more than 15 years.

"It's good for the kids. It gives them self-confidence," he said.

Padilla served in the U.S. Army from 1966-69 and was in combat in Vietnam with the 9th Infantry Division.

The tenets of the program reflect military values, such as self-discipline, motivation and honesty, he said, adding that participants must have their grades up-to-par before participating.

On average, the program has anywhere between 25 to 30 kids participating, including a number of female boxers learning the secrets of the sweet science.

The newfound support from the city saved the program, which had to close for about a month

because there was no facility for training. The program was formerly located at Rio West Mall for a short time before the city integrated the program into the parks department.

“We were making due with duct tape and what have you. The city got this building for us and we will have a small budget for equipment,” Padilla said. “We need to grow programs like this for the community.

“These kids need something to do. (The program) helps the parents. It helps the kids,” he added.

The Gallup Youth Boxing Program is open to area youth from age nine on up. The program does not accept kids that are in trouble with the law or participants who have substance abuse problems, including smoking cigarettes.

Diaz began volunteering with the program about five years ago, when Padilla approached him after a veterans meeting, asking for assistance.

Diaz is a U.S. Army veteran and saw combat in Iraq. He is disabled and said his volunteerism is a means of giving back to the community.

“We’re teaching basic boxing, trying to give the kids something positive to do,” he said.

Kids are trained in use of the heavy bag, boxing mitts and speed bag. Sparring is also taught.

“We have a lot of students who come in and workout,” he said. “This is what we practice here: self-discipline, pride, self-motivation, teamwork, and leadership.”

The perils of alcoholism, drug abuse, gang violence and juvenile delinquency are real world

problems that kids are exposed to daily, he said, adding that keeping youth out of trouble with programs like boxing is important.

“It’s not about us, it’s about making our youth better. We’re just doing a small part to keep these kids productive. Boxing keeps them out of trouble,” Diaz said.

The boxing program is open to the public Monday through Thursday from 5:30 to 7 pm.

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