

New city Boys & Girls Club unveiled

By Sian Perry, News-Leader

Guests at the annual Boys & Girls Clubs of Nassau County gala benefit Friday night at The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island, enjoyed fine food, a silent auction, entertainment - and one great big surprise as Bill Gower, foundation president, announced plans for a brand new Fernandina Beach club.

As Gower concluded the welcome address at the start of the dinner, he told the crowd, "There's one more announcement, and it's a doozy. We are going to build a downtown Fernandina Beach club!"

"We've been working on this for three years," Gower added as he unveiled a rendering of the proposed building, which will be located on land at Southside Elementary on Lime Street provided by the Nassau County School Board at \$1 per year for 99 years. The large one-story structure has covered walkways, ample parking, green play space and covered sports courts out back.

The Fernandina club, currently located in a former residence at South 11th and Indigo streets, has been over capacity for more than a year, Gower noted. The new club will be able to accommodate 240 children.

The capital campaign will get under way in earnest in 2011, he said, and the foundation is confident it will be a success, thanks to the support it has received so far from the community, including Friday night's sold-out event. The silent auction raised another \$32,900.

"Because of you we know our newly announced capital campaign will be a success," said Ann Moser, a member of the board of directors who also organized the annual gala.

Gower called the moment an "historic event." He noted, "All we have to do now is build it and bring on the kids."

Currently the Miller Freedom Center in Nassauville, an expansive facility built with donated funds, and the Fernandina Beach Club serve nearly 300 children each day, providing a variety of structured programs "that stress academics first," as well as summer activities. The student-to-staff ratio is 18:1, and in the first semester of the 2010-11 school year, 44 percent of the club kids made the A-B honor roll at their schools, Gower told the audience.

All funds raised in the upcoming capital campaign will go exclusively to the new Fernandina Beach facility. For more information, contact the Boys & Girls Clubs of Nassau County Foundation at 261-8666, email info@bgcnassau.org or visit www.bgcassau.org.



A rendering of the proposed Boys & Girls Club in Fernandina Beach by Miranda Architects, above, was unveiled Friday by Bill Gower at the annual Boys & Girls Clubs of Nassau County gala benefit. *Submitted*