

Healing & Hope News

"The work will continue..."
— Father Edward J. Flanagan,
Founder of Boys Town

Boys Town's 14th Annual Blue Water Bash Sets New Fundraising Record



Boys Town's 14th Annual Blue Water Bash, held on July 12 at the historic Roof Garden Ballroom in Arnolds Park, drew more

than 250 supporters and broke all previous fundraising records. Preliminary totals show the event surpassed last year's \$250,000 goal, with all proceeds benefiting Camp Okoboji—funding cabin maintenance, restoration and the long-term preservation of this cherished Boys Town tradition.

The evening began with an invocation by Father Jeff Mollner, Boys Town's National Director of Mission and Spirituality. CEO Rod Kempkes then welcomed guests and reflected on the camp's legacy of life-changing experiences.

"Since the 1950s, Okoboji has given our youth their first fish on the line, their first boat wake to conquer and their first night around a campfire free from worry," said Kempkes. "Every dollar raised tonight helps keep those firsts alive for the next generation."

Blue Water Bash event chairs, Lauri & Kevin Bousema and Alex & Cody Bousema, shared their experience of attending the event since 2018 and witnessing the transformative impact Boys Town and the Okoboji Campgrounds have had on the lives of Boys Town youth over the years.

One of the evening's most powerful moments came when newly elected Boys Town Mayor Evan—Boys Town's 125th mayor—received a standing ovation after sharing his journey. From homelessness in Los Angeles, to varsity sports and a promising welding career path, Evan credited Camp Okoboji with helping shape his education and personal growth.

Additional stories from current youth and Family-Teachers echoed the camp's impact, emphasizing the importance of boating, fishing, tubing and simply being kids in a safe, supportive environment.

Boys Town alumnus and 2024 Alumni Sports Hall of Fame inductee Barney Hill offered a heartfelt reflection, recalling how his week at Okoboji helped him believe that "freedom and hope were possible." Once fearing a future behind bars, Hill now splits his time between an Okoboji home and winters in Florida—proof of what transformation looks like.

The live auction—described by longtime attendees as "the best yet"—featured a custom-made motorized Templeton Rye barrel bar crafted by chair Kevin Bousema. Bidding wars were so intense that several high-demand packages, including Italian and Mexican villa getaways, were sold twice. In a show of overwhelming generosity, paddle-raisers answered the call for \$100,000 in freewill donations within minutes.

The evening closed with live music and a moving group performance of the song, "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother," reaffirming Boys Town's core belief in compassion and shared responsibility.

Since 1953, Camp Okoboji has offered Boys Town youth the kind of summer escape many have never had the chance to experience. Thanks to the incredible generosity shown at this year's Blue Water Bash, that tradition is set to continue for generations to come.

Next year's event will feature a Boys Town Cowboys/Boots & Buckles Bash theme and will again be held at the Arnold's Park Roof Garden on Saturday, July 18th.



HELLO Summer!

The Summer We Became Kids Again

For many of the youth at Boys Town, summer hasn't always meant fun and freedom. It's often been a season of instability or missed childhood moments. But this year, thanks to our incredible staff and generous community partners, our kids are finally getting what every child deserves—a summer filled with joy, discovery and connection.

Boys Town's Summer Enrichment Program is made possible through the hard work of trained summer support staff and a carefully planned activity schedule. Each week is built around hands-on learning, teamwork and fun.

Our kids have explored careers, practiced empathy and learned practical skills like cooking and basic mechanics.

They've launched rockets, built and raced Pinewood Derby cars, created art and baked everything from caramel apple bites to custom cupcakes. One of the highlights? The *Soggy Bottom Regatta* is a fun event where youth build cardboard boats and race them across the pool at the Palrang Fieldhouse.

We've also made room for creative expression and connection through visits and workshops from amazing partners, including:

- » American Midwest Ballet
- » Omaha Street Percussion
- » Heartland Hip Hop
- » Humane Society

- » Topgolf
- » Metro Community College
- » Army & Air Force Recruiters
- » UNO Pickleball with Noble

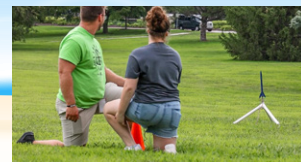
These partners helped bring our programming to life through performances, field trips, mentorship and hands-on activities that left our kids smiling from ear to ear.

What makes this summer even more meaningful is the way Boys Town staff jump in judging cupcake competitions, cheering at pool races or helping with crafts and games.

Their involvement creates moments of joy and connection that our kids will carry with them long after summer ends.

This summer isn't just about having fun it's about healing, growing and learning how to have healthy, meaningful fun with others. Many of our kids are experiencing this kind of summer for the very first time, and it's thanks to a community that believes in them.

To everyone who played a part, thank you. You didn't just make summer happen. You helped make childhood happen.



Celebrating Legacy and Community The 37th Biennial Boys Town Alumni Family Reunion



Boys Town proudly welcomed alumni from across the country for the 37th Biennial Alumni Family Reunion. The event served as both a homecoming and

a celebration of the powerful legacy that Boys Town alumni continue to build—one rooted in resilience, service and support for future generations.

Boys Town alumni are an essential part of our community. Not only do they carry the values learned during their time on campus into the world, but many also give back through scholarships, mentorship and continued involvement in campus life. Their impact is deeply felt and we are incredibly grateful for their unwavering commitment to helping today's students succeed.

The weekend kicked off with early registration on Thursday at the Hall of History. The alumni enjoyed looking through old yearbooks and pictures from their days at the Home. Many remembered riding the "Flex" bus, now displayed in the museum, across America for

sporting events and choir tours. While in Omaha for the convention, a number of alumni met with their former Boys Town teachers, coaches and family teachers to share memories and say thank you. Friday featured a friendly golf tournament and the BTNAA Board Meeting, culminating in a warm Welcome Social at the Great Hall—a perfect setting to reconnect and reminisce.

Saturday was filled with both reflection and celebration. After breakfast at the Visitor's Center, alumni gathered for a General Assembly and Elections, followed by a moving Veterans Memorial Ceremony at the flagpole. Campus tours and a special screening of *Father Flanagan: Heart of a Servant* offered a glimpse into both our past and our future. The evening banquet at the Scott Conference Center brought everyone together for a night of stories, laughter and renewed commitment to the mission.

On Sunday, spiritual services in both Chambers and Dowd Chapel were followed by a lakeside Farewell Picnic, closing the weekend with joy and connection.

Reunions like this remind us why we gather—to honor the past, celebrate the present and build a stronger future together. Thank you to all who made this weekend unforgettable.

The First-Ever Boys Town Olympics

A Week of Joy, Community and Life-Changing Memories



There are moments in childhood that stick with you forever. These kinds of memories are so big, so full of laughter and excitement, that they become part of who you are. For the kids at Boys Town, the first-ever Boys Town Olympics was one of those moments.

Over the course of a week, families came together as “countries” to compete for gold, silver and bronze medals in a series of wildly creative events. From the official Opening Ceremonies to the final medal celebration, the campus buzzed with energy, teamwork and pure joy.

A WEEK OF UNFORGETTABLE EVENTS

No ordinary competition, the Boys Town Olympics featured events that blended imagination, physical activity and a whole lot of fun:

- » Archery (Kickball Style) – Aiming for the target took on a whole new meaning!
- » Equestrian Jumping (Inflatable Horses Included) – Because why not ride a bouncy steed to victory?
- » Diving (Biggest Splash & Creativity Awards) – Cannonballs, flips and style points ruled the pool.
- » Surfing (Well... People Surfing) – Balance, bravery and a lot of laughter.
- » Canoe Sprint (Inflatable Edition) – Teamwork made the dream work.
- » Non-Traditional Triathlon (Featuring a Three-Legged Race) – Because nothing bonds people like trying to run while tied together!

And of course, the week wrapped up with a Closing Ceremony, where every child was celebrated for showing up, trying hard and being part of something bigger than themselves.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE—OR IN THIS CASE, A TOWN

What made this event truly special wasn’t just the games—it was the entire Boys Town community coming together to make it happen. Staff from across campus volunteered their time, energy and creativity to bring the Olympics to life. The youth care team went above and beyond, designing events that were as inventive as they were fun.

This is what Boys Town is all about: a village united in changing the trajectory of kids’ lives. Many of these children come from backgrounds where joy was scarce, where stability and celebration weren’t guaranteed. But here, they experience something different, they experience love, structure, education and moments of pure happiness.

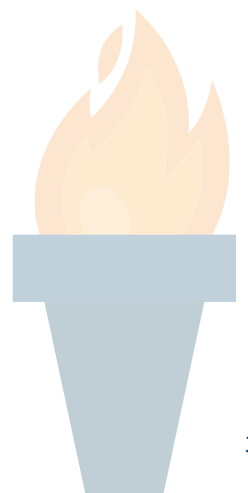
WHY MEMORIES LIKE THIS MATTER

For kids who have faced hardship, events like the Boys Town Olympics are not just for fun, they are purposeful. Events like this rewrite expectations. They show children that childhood can be full of laughter, teamwork and adults who cheer them on. These memories become a blueprint for how to do life different. They show that families can be strong and that joy is something every child deserves.

That’s how cycles break. That’s how inspiration takes root. That’s how you change the life of a child.

At Boys Town, we don’t just teach kids, we give them experiences they’ll carry forever. And if the first-ever Boys Town Olympics proved anything, it’s that when a community comes together with love and purpose, incredible things happen.

Here’s to many more gold-medal moments ahead.





Father Flanagan and the Road to Sainthood

Father Edward J. Flanagan, founder of Boys Town, lived a life defined by faith, compassion and courage. Born prematurely in 1886 in a stone cottage in Ireland, he wasn't expected to survive the night. But with the warmth and prayers provided by his grandfather, he did—setting the stage for a life devoted to serving the forgotten.

From early on, young Eddie felt called to the priesthood. Despite chronic health problems that forced him to leave seminary once, he returned and was eventually ordained. In 1917, he established Boys Town in Nebraska, a safe haven for at-risk boys. His belief that “there’s no such thing as a bad boy” guided his work, even in the face of criticism. He welcomed children of every race, religion and background, standing firm in his mission when few others would.

After World War II, President Truman enlisted his help to advise on care for war orphans overseas. While on that mission in Germany, Father Flanagan passed away in 1948—still serving the children he loved so deeply.

Today, Father Flanagan’s cause for sainthood is progressing through the Catholic Church’s rigorous canonization process. This journey involves several distinct stages:

1. Pre-Diocesan
2. Diocesan Phase
3. Roman Phase
4. Beatification
5. Canonization



Father Flanagan was a true visionary whose belief in the potential of every child still shapes Boys Town today. If you’re inspired by his story and want to reflect more on the values he lived by, we invite you to follow along with our 5-day inspirational series, where we share moments from his life, his words and the lasting impact of his mission. It’s a meaningful way to connect with the legacy that continues to guide us more than a century later.

Scan here to follow along.



Upcoming Events

May 7, 2026 **Booster Banquet** at a View West Shores.

July 18, 2026 **Blue Water Bash** at Arnold’s Park Roof Garden



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For more great stories, visit

BOYSTOWN.ORG/nebraska

For more than a century, Boys Town has provided help for children, strength for families and hope for communities of high need. From prevention to Intervention, Boys Town provides a wide range of services dependent on individual needs of more than 150,000 children and families in the region each year. In addition to our campus, Boys Town expanded its programs and services to the community with neighborhood offices in North and South Omaha, as well as additional services in Central and Western Nebraska to include Grand Island, Duncan, Kearney and North Platte.



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our mission

Changing the way America cares for children and families.