

Faculty at Sullivan High School and local landlords gather to cut the ribbon on a new specialty classroom funded and constructed in large part by the area's real estate investors.



Investing in Giving Back

CHICAGO LANDLORDS MAKE LOCAL SCHOOLS THEIR PERSONAL MISSION.

by Linda Liberatore

Giving back to the communities in which you invest will never be a bad decision. In a small corridor in the city of Chicago, you can clearly see why this is true. Here, in Rogers Park, you will meet a group of landlords who have been holding meetings since 1992, the Rogers Park Builders Group. The RPBG mission is to make the neighborhood a safe and better place to call home for residents and real estate investors.

Rogers Park has one of the most diverse populations in the metropolitan area, and community members are active in local and citywide politics, business and art initiatives, and community improvement projects. In the heart of the

area lies the Loyola University Campus. With Evanston on the north and Lake Michigan on the east, Rogers Park is the North Shore suburbs' gateway to Chicago.



SUPPORTING SULLIVAN HIGH SCHOOL TOGETHER

RPBG members came together to give back to the Rogers Park community and have collaborated on multiple projects to that end. One special partnership deserves particular note, as it was perfect for the skill sets of the landlords and a much-needed relationship for the local high school. Several years ago, Sullivan High School suffered from declining en-

rollment and low scores, placing it on the watch list of schools the Chicago Public School System (CPS) was looking to close.

Before taking such a drastic step, however, CPS installed a new principal, Chad Adams, who had some very clear ideas about where to begin making changes that would save Sullivan. He immediately implemented a plan to instill a new set of core values in the school's faculty and students, including a sense of community pride. Those values perfectly aligned with RPBG's values, and the collaboration between the landlords and Sullivan was set in motion.

RPBG members viewed a collaboration with Sullivan as the perfect opportunity to demonstrate the deep commitment they have for the community in which many of them make their livelihood. This pledge was amply demon-

WHY LOW-INCIDENCE PROGRAMS MATTER

Sullivan's Low-Incidence Program (LIP) makes the school a vital member of its local school system. "Low-incidence refers to disabilities that are relatively uncommon in the general population: Blindness, deafness and autism are all considered low-incidence disabilities. Because they are relatively uncommon, not every school in the CPS system has this type of program.

With the new facility built, Sullivan's low-incidence program will have better tools to teach such basic life skills as how to prepare food, do laundry and attend to personal hygiene. The kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, and laundry room are a perfect "set" in which these students can practice their daily living skills, making mistakes and adjustments until they achieve the perfect routine for themselves in a safe environment under the supervision of trained professionals.

This type of program serves a vital need in the community because without it, many low-incidence students would not have access to the training needed to live and work productively and independently on a daily basis. Many parents are not necessarily available for this type of daily, intensive training, nor can they necessarily afford personal tutoring from an industry professional. LIP brings these skills and the stage in which to practice them to students who will, as a result, experience a more diverse array of opportunities throughout their lives as a result.

Below: The Rogers Park Builders Group did not exit the building after completing the LIP classroom. The entire group remains actively involved with Sullivan High School to this day. (Pictured left to right) Boomer Berman, Michael Glasser and Chuck Stransky .



strated by RPBG's unwavering commitment to the substantial fundraising and construction effort that was required to bring their first project, funding and erecting a vitally important classroom facility that would help keep Sullivan's doors open, to fruition. The process also opened a new world of contact between the students and families at Sullivan, the wonderful staff and faculty at this public school, and RPBG members themselves.

Over the course of a year, RPBG raised over \$15,000 in cash and in-kind donations of appliances, services and construction materials to build a new classroom facility for the Low Incidence Program (LIP) at Sullivan High School (see sidebar). This project transformed a tired classroom into a virtual apartment with all the amenities of a modern living space except a working toilet. The new teaching facility comes complete with a modern kitchen, washer and dryer, and even a fold-out Murphy bed. It will be used to teach students in the school's Low-Incidence Program basic life skills that they can carry with them out into the wider world after they graduate.

A LASTING COLLABORATION

The RPBG-Sullivan relationship did not end with the completion of the low-incidence classroom. Soon there was another need that RPBG would help meet.

In 2016, the band program had been cut

along with broader CPS budget reductions. When some old band equipment was uncovered in a storeroom, Sullivan High School approached RPBG about assisting with the restoration of the high school band program.

The project started with the rehab of the band equipment which revitalized the energy of the student body. With the advent of the marching band came an undefeated football season, which created even more school pride!

Since then, RPBG has helped establish the nonprofit Friends of Sullivan, which donated refurbished football pads to the team and established a scholarship program. Every real estate investor was brought to tears when the thank-you videos played.

The collaboration was a surprisingly rich and meaningful experience for many of the people whose lives it touched. For Sullivan, it not only resulted in a wonderful new facility that they could not otherwise have provided for themselves, but also created ties to the local business community that will serve the school well in the years ahead. Give back to the communities where you invest; the payback is more valuable than anything you will ever see in your bank account. •



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