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The PHOENIX *Club*

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Bo Zimmerman, Micajah Sturdivant

The Phoenix Club of Memphis began as a local organization in 1958, dedicating its labor and fund-raising to youth. Young men who had a sincere interest in furthering the goals of the club and who had potential for future leadership in the community were invited to join, and through hard work and ingenuity, together they raised the necessary funds to establish the first Boys Club in Memphis. In the early 1960s the Memphis Club annually raised \$11,000 to \$12,000 for the Boys Club; by the late 1990s, that amount had increased to \$175,000. Thanks to the energy and enthusiasm of club members, five Boys Clubs have now been established in the greater Memphis area, and in the 1990s they were opened to girls as well.



The Phoenix Club

The Phoenix Club is a new and energetic addition to the civic and social scene in Jackson. Originating in Memphis and existing also in Birmingham, Denver and Nashville, the Phoenix Club now thrives in Jackson as well. Developed as civic and social service clubs for young professional men of post-college age to 35, all Phoenix Clubs are dedicated to the support the Boys and Girls Clubs in their areas. The Jackson club is no exception, with all its proceeds going to support of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Mississippi.

The club's goals are three-fold: to raise money for the betterment of the youth served by the Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Mississippi; to develop leadership qualities in its members; and to create a civic and social network in the community. Club members are adamant that their fund-raisers will not be a rubber stamp of those of other organizations. "We want to create signature events, one-of-a-kind parties that will become regular dates on the community's calendar," enthuses Micajah Sturdivant, president of Jackson's Phoenix Club.

The club plans several fund-raisers, signature parties and programs annually. The enormously successful second annual Seersucker and Sombreros, the club's spring celebration of the Kentucky Derby and Cinco de Mayo, Mexico's Independence Day, was held on May 3 at the River Hills Tennis Club. "Partygoers came dressed in derby attire ready to cheer on their favorite horses and sip mint juleps while watching the historic race on big screen TVs," explains Sturdivant. "After the race, margaritas and the sound of a mariachi band kicked off an evening of live music and entertainment."

Another such program is the Holiday Greeting Card Campaign where local artists as well as Boys and Girls Club members design greeting cards. The greeting cards are then sold to individuals and businesses.

Sturdivant emphasizes that the club encourages its members to assume future leadership roles in the community and provides opportunities for growth in that direction. He says, "Our luncheons feature leaders of the community who speak about their life and career experiences that were a source in their achieved success." He adds, "And we hope in turn to be good role models for the members of the Boys and Girls Club with the expectation that they too will become community leaders as adults."

The Phoenix Club also meets an important need in providing a social outlet for its members. "Our organization offers a myriad of benefits, not the least of which is meeting great friends, and building business relationships with the city's movers, shakers and leaders. Our current members consist of a group of 40 guys who are in leadership roles in such companies as Balch and Bingham, Parkway Properties, Siemens, Comcast, and Mattiace Properties." The Phoenix Club of Jackson does not discriminate in its membership nor does it hold functions at any facility which discriminates on the basis of race, creed or national origin.

The excellent reputation of the Phoenix Club of Memphis has led to the club's expansion as members of that original club moved into other communities. "I first heard of the Phoenix Club of Memphis through Jim Barksdale and his association with the Boys and Girls Clubs there," says Billy Redd, executive director of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Mississippi. "Jim Barksdale, Mississippi businessman and philanthropist, told me he was a member of the Memphis Phoenix Club. So when Micajah Sturdivant came to me with his idea of starting a Phoenix Club here, I was thrilled. He shared his vision and his dreams for the club and for the youth of this area. Micajah operates on one speed - wide open. His enthusiasm is infectious. How could I say no?"

Sturdivant, a Greenwood native, wanted to continue serving civic causes after graduating from Ole Miss. Before leaving his post-college job in Memphis to pursue a master's in business from Harvard Business School, he came to understand the impact the Phoenix Club of Memphis had in the community. "When I returned to Jackson to work with MMI Hotel Group, I saw that all of the pieces were just waiting to be put together for such a club here."

For assistance Sturdivant tapped his old Jackson friends, Bo Zimmerman, a graduate of St. Joseph High School and Mississippi State University; Travis Ezelle, graduate of Murrah High School and Millsaps; and Brad Reeves, graduate of Jackson Academy, Mississippi State University and Ole Miss Law School. These four, along with Sidney Allen and Matthew McLaughlin, constitute the club's board.

Zimmerman, a financial advisor with Smith Barney and Phoenix's vice president for programs, shares Sturdivant's excitement about the club and its mission. "Our first meeting we got a few guys together at

Habana Smoke Shoppe," says Zimmerman. "Now, a little more than a year later, we have 40 members. We meet bimonthly for lunch at River Hills, and we will have several social events each year with the expectation of reaching our goal of raising \$150,000 by 2012. It is a sizable goal, but the board of the club believes its members are up for the challenge." Prospective members sign a commitment letter agreeing to adhere to the organization's principles and membership responsibilities for a minimum of three years.

"The typical members of the Phoenix Club of Jackson," says Sturdivant, "have served in leadership positions in high school and college. Upon entering the working world, they want to utilize those skills and experiences by making a commitment to the community outside their jobs. Working for children meets a real need in our cities."

Redd says, "All these guys are fantastic to work with. They are bright, energetic and dedicated to building a strong and solid foundation for the club, moving steadily and thoughtfully. It takes men of passion and drive to accomplish what these men have done in the past year and a half."

The Phoenix Club of Jackson is eager to round up an equally impressive group of men next year who share these same values. If you would like to learn more about the membership and events of the Phoenix Club of Jackson, visit their Web site at www.phoenixclubof-jackson.com.

THE BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS OF CENTRAL MISSISSIPPI

Since 1936 more than 5,000 children have been served annually by the seven Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Mississippi. Their mission is "to inspire and enable all young people, especially those who need it the most, to realize their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens."

These clubs have been in the forefront of youth development, working with young people from disadvantaged economic, social and family circumstances. The clubs of Central Mississippi actively seek to reach at-risk girls and boys and give them greater access to quality programs and services which will enhance their lives and shape their futures.