



Advocate for kids chosen to lead fundraiser

By Joanne Fox jfox@siouxcityjournal.com | Posted: Monday, October 3, 2011 12:00 am

JACKSON, Neb. -- Leonard Gill reminisced about his growing up in Jackson with some humor.

"You know, after my freshman year of high school, they asked that I not come back," he confessed. "My mom told them, 'Don't worry. He won't be coming back,' and I enrolled in Heelan High School."

Gill maintains it was that defining moment that set him on the road to a better life, one that is not always afforded to clients of the agency of which he has been a longtime supporter and advocate.

Gill has been a volunteer with the Boys and Girls Home and Family Services Inc. for the past 15 years and this year will serve as the honorary chair for Tailgating for Our Kids, taking place Oct. 14 at the Marina Inn.

The designation of honorary chairs for the event is a tradition established to recognize individuals in the community who have illustrated commitment and generosity through volunteer efforts and support, explained Art Silva, president and CEO of the organization.

"It is with genuine appreciation that Boys and Girls Home and Family Services recognizes Leonard as honorary chair of this year's event," he said. "Leonard's quiet and compassionate way of providing leadership, direction and support to the many causes and projects in Siouxland is worthy of recognition."

After graduating from Heelan High School, Gill went on to serve in the military, marry, raise a family of four and run a successful business. Over the past 20 years, he has built strong connections to Boys and Girls Home clients and employees.

"I was contacted to volunteer with the agency by Terri Dooley," he said, referring to the agency's executive vice president of development.

"I remember growing up in a small town, where big families were the norm and most kids lived on farms and had jobs, had two parents and Mom was at home when they were done with school. That left little time to get into trouble," Gill added. "I saw a big difference between those days and how different life had become for many kids. It is, to me, an unfortunate fact of life that many young people associated with the Boys and Girls Home do not have those advantages."

For years, Gill offered Boys and Girls Home clients the opportunity to join him to fish and enjoy the outdoors. He has also supported every Boys and Girls Home and Family Services campaign to provide needed improvements and upgrades to the facility. Gill is currently a member of the Enhancing Lives Capital Improvements Campaign Endorsement Council.

"Like many nonprofits, funding is getting harder to find because federal funds are being cut, expenses are increasing and the economy is tough," he acknowledged. "I will say that Siouxlanders are generous when it comes to supporting worthwhile projects."

Boys and Girls Home and Family Services has been helping children and families address their problems for more than 117 years. The organization's mission is to improve the lives of children and families, and it's one Gill supports enthusiastically.

"I've always been partial to helping kids," he admitted. "They are, after all, our future."