

# Big Brothers Big Sisters building gets new look

By: [Dave Thompson](#) July 17, 2023

Jay Justin likes to tell a story of how [Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Mississippi Valley](#) (BBBS) helps young people gain skills to deal with life.

Not too long ago, an adult mentor took a young man to a job interview at a Panera Bread in the Quad Cities. The mentor waited in the car as the young man interviewed for the job. After a short wait, he came out of the store and announced he got the job and was to start in a few days.

The mentor was excited, but the young man seemed to be depressed about the situation. After a little questioning, the mentor found out that the youngster wasn't excited about the job because he was told there was a dress code for employees – a white shirt and khaki pants – and he didn't have those clothes and couldn't afford to buy them.

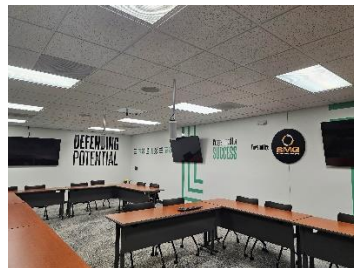
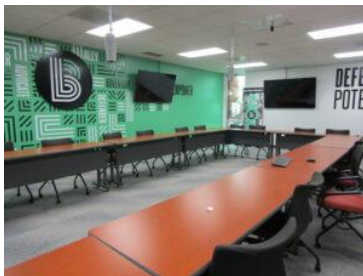
The mentor quickly came up with a solution: he would buy the needed clothing and the young man would pay him back once he started to get paid at his new job. With a solution found, the youngster had a brighter outlook on his new job.

“Every day in your life there is some type of problem solving. ... Our focus is to get kids out in the community and see what the game of life is all about,” said Mr. Justin, president and CEO of [Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Mississippi Valley](#), an organization helps 500 to 700 young people in the region every year.

That focus on problem solving, giving young people self esteem and getting young people to cope with life has been the centerpiece of BBBS for years. Those goals have not changed, but Big Brothers Big Sisters local building is changing a bit and getting a new look.

The organization moved to its new mentoring center last fall at 3247 E. 35th St., Court, Davenport. Now that center is in the midst of an update so the group can better serve young people in the community.

Within the past few weeks, two big projects have been completed. First, a large meeting room has been renovated and updated. That is being called the Bigs Room Project. Also, an outdoor patio space has been updated. That is being called the Optimist Plaza Project.



This is the newly renovated Bigs Room at the Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Mississippi Valley.

An open house celebration and ribbon-cutting dedication are set for 4:30 p.m. Tuesday, July 25, in honor of those projects.

“It really exceeds your expectations. It exceeds your vision,” Mr. Justin recently said of those projects.

For instance, the transformed Bigs Room now has five large TV screens, a series of tables arranged in a large rectangle formation, logos on a green wall and the words “Defending Potential” on another wall. The room was completed a couple of months ago and has been used to host a series of meetings and training events, Mr. Justin said.

“What was so cool about this project was all the players who came in helped with it,” he added. In addition to hosting BBBS events and meetings, the Bigs Room is open for use by outside groups.



Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Mississippi Valley moved to 3247 E. 35th St., Court, Davenport, last fall.

According to information from Mr. Justin about the two projects:

- **Optimist Plaza:** The goal was to create a new space for the organization to use for direct program activities (match interviews, committee and team meetings, match activities, and social gatherings). The project involved the demolition and rebuild of the outdoor patio area. The project involved removing all storefront windows and entry, removal of three trees; removal of all concrete, removal of rock and shrubbery; new storefront frame, glass and entrance, new pressed and colored concrete, new landscaping, new tables, umbrellas, warmers, lighting and grill. It cost more than \$30,000 to complete and was finished with a combination of in-kind service/materials and cash contributions. IT's named Optimist Plaza because four area Optimist Clubs and the Optimist International Foundation provided funding for the finishing items (tables, umbrellas, lights, grill). This is the first joint project funded by the Iowa side Optimist Clubs, with each contributing a portion of the \$15,000 goal. The clubs are 100% volunteer and raise funds through their “flag” program – which sells annual subscriptions to residents to have a flag placed at their home each federal holiday. Deloitte volunteers also did a service day to remove rock and bushes and landscaped the area. Goetz Concrete removed and installed concrete at significantly reduced cost, and East Moline Glass removed and installed the new storefront at a significantly reduced cost. BITCO, memorial gifts, and Scott County Regional Authority also provided funding for the storefront and concrete costs.
- **Bigs Room Solutions Management Group (SMG)** transformed the large conference room into a state-of-the-art training and meeting center. SMG has expertise in creating innovative classroom and training centers throughout eastern Iowa and western Illinois. Primary partners are area community colleges, colleges and universities, high schools and businesses. SMG offered to do a complete assessment of the BBBS training needs and allocated more than \$20,000 in equipment and services to create a new training and meeting space. The space includes five flat-screen TVs, two telecommunication owl units, surround sound, touchpad controls, and network connectivity. Nine SMG employees from throughout the area donated time and talents to complete the project. The space will be used for various training and meetings within BBBS, match activities and social gatherings, as well as made

available to the public. Mr. Justin said “we have had numerous clubs and businesses use the space for meetings and retreats.” DMW Designs finished off both projects with design and recognition elements.

There will likely be more projects and renovations coming to the Big Brothers Big Sisters building. Mr. Justin said the building’s small interview room will be updated. Also, the “Dugout” area, which is a large open space for staff workers, will also see a renovation project.

