

J-Hawk booster club has raised \$1.8 million

Written by Mike Deupree

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"It's amazing how much money can be made by selling a candy bar or bag of popcorn one item at a time," says Mark Fiala, technology facilitator at Jefferson High School.

Is "amazing" a bit of an exaggeration? Well, recently the Jefferson Athletic Booster Club, of which Fiala is currently president, gave JHS athletics a \$50,000 contribution, and it was the second \$50,000 check the club has given this school year. That brings the total to more than \$1.8 million over the years.

Yes, "amazing" sums it up pretty well.

"Vital" would work, too. Just ask Athletics Director Scott Kibby.

The club has been in existence since the 1957-58 school year, but "Most of that (\$1.8 million) has come recently," said Kibby, "about \$800,000 in just the past nine years."

The club's goal is \$100,000 per year. Of that \$100,000, Kibby said about \$60,000 is needed "just to make ends meet," to cover operating expenses. Hiring officials, alone, costs about \$45,000 a year, he said.

The rest of the contribution helps fund one-time expenses, usually facilities improvements. Asked to mention a few of them, Kibby rattled off a long list ranging from new bags for the golf team to an extensive improvement of the baseball facilities that included resurfacing the diamond, constructing new dugouts and building new restrooms (which also are used for soccer and football).

Among the other projects made possible by the booster club were renovation and fencing of the soccer field at Lower Kingston, construction of an auxiliary field, crowning of the sophomore

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football field to fix a drainage problem, resurfacing of the softball field, refinishing poles and buying new nets for volleyball, and purchasing new scoreboards for basketball and swimming, which also got new lane lines, touch pads and starting blocks.

That's a lot of work. It took a lot of money, and it represents a lot of candy bars and popcorn ... and burgers and hot dogs and peanuts and cheesecake and so forth, not to mention the time and effort of a lot of people.

"Our club operates with four officers, 13 concession stand managers, one product manager and 30 to 40 relentless volunteers," Fiala said recently. "The credit for our club's success goes entirely to these people. They are the ones who are 'in the trenches' doing the work and putting in the countless hours for our students. I cannot compliment or thank them enough!"

How are the funds raised? In a variety of ways. One is the sale of club memberships, which are available at the \$10, \$25, \$100 and \$225 level. About 127 memberships were sold this year, but that includes couples and families. "The actual number of people that are members is probably in the 200-250 range," said Fiala, who added that non-members also are welcome to help out, especially students.

"I think that their involvement makes a positive impression in our community," he said of the students. "It demonstrates to the adults that our students have an interest and play an active role in raising funds for their athletic programs. This is a good culture to promote."

The club has sponsored pancake breakfasts, chili suppers, auctions and an NFL raffle, and it runs concession stands at all the sports venues, indoor and outdoor, not only for sports events but for dances and other activities.

The big money-maker, though, is the concession franchise at Kingston Stadium, which the club runs for all games, not just those involving Jefferson.

"It requires a crew of four stand managers and 30-40 volunteers to run the concession stands on a football night at Kingston," Fiala said. "As you can imagine, we have a considerable

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amount of money tied up in equipment in order to run all these sites.”

Ownership of the equipment was a major reason the Jefferson club retained the Kingston concession business when questions were raised about 40 years ago whether it was fair to the other schools. As it wasn't feasible to have supporters of Kennedy and Washington share the duties, some other adjustments were made. For instance, gate receipts from a game at Kingston were to be shared equally instead of being kept by the schools involved in the game, as had been the practice, and Kennedy was given responsibility for ticket-selling, ushering and security.

Not surprisingly, the Jefferson club has received statewide awards for its fundraising, but most important to its members, it has justified the message printed on the club t-shirt design:

“A Proud Tradition . . . Working for Kids.”