

Southern California School Districts Look To BHAAA As A Model

By Abbey Hood

It generates almost \$1 million for Beverly High, assists in the operation of a self-sufficient athletic department and brings alumni back to their lockers at Norman Nation.

Now, The Beverly Hills Athletic Alumni Association (BHAAA) is taking their show on the road, marketing the organization to schools throughout Southern California. The BHAAA, with support from State Superintendent Jack O'Connell, is showing how in times of fiscal crisis alumni are ready to help.

BHAAA is serving as a model for school districts in the state looking at implementing new in-

come sources.

"We want to be trailblazers," said Founder Steven Fenton. "We want everyone to dream with us."

Fenton and Beverly High Athletic Director Carter Paysinger presented their program to about 20 representatives from the Bay, Pioneer and Ocean athletic leagues at a meeting for high school athletic departments at Mira Vista High School in Manhattan Beach on Tuesday.

Principals, assistant principals and athletic directors from Palos Verdes, Santa Monica, Culver City, Torrance and Redondo listened to Fenton and Paysinger

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deliver a simple message: run an athletic department like a university's and alumni will be there to fill in financial gaps.

"The key is getting alumni back on campus," said Fenton. "So people can touch it and feel it."

It is an easy to do philosophy, with big results. BHAAA in its first year raised close to \$1 million. Now, the athletic department doesn't have to strictly rely on its \$8,000 annual budget funded by the school district.

BHAAA has purchased new uniforms and equipment for the school's baseball, boys and girls basketball and soccer, football, softball, tennis, water polo, lacrosse, wrestling teams, as well as the track and field team and the cheerleading squad.

In addition, BHAAA purchased the scoreboard on the football field that is being used by a multitude of sports, new baskets and backboards and initiated a new endowment fund for future needs in the athletic department.

"BHAAA has been tremendous," said Paysinger. "In athletics, we could be self sufficient."

In the past, the school tried to raise funds through support groups that came and went, the money raised was not high, said Paysinger.

The beauty of the alumni association is that the people who care aren't necessarily those with kids in the schools, he added about the organization's 75 members.

"Most of our alums are moderately successful business people," said Fenton. "The majority were not star athletes, but there was something about playing sports that stuck with them."

BHAAA athletes meet three times a year at the high school's

campus and hold an annual dinner, said Fenton. "You need an anchor," he advised the group.

For Beverly Hills, the anchor comes in the form of their annual Hall of Fame dinner in October honoring former athletes, whose names are also on BHAAA's Hall of Fame wall, dedicated to Don Reynolds after a lead donation by Jeanne Reynolds last fall. The wall is located at the north end of the high school's football stadium.

Last year's dinner netted more than \$130,000, \$50,000 more than the original goal. We charged \$275 a plate, you can charge anything, he said to school representatives.

"These three meetings and the dinner are like a reunion," said Paysinger. "It's rekindling friendships, people look forward to it."

Redondo Beach had tried to establish a program similar to BHAAA, but was not successful because it did not have an anchor like the dinner or the wall, said Redondo Union High School Athletic Director Les Congelliere.

"We needed something to focus on like the dinner," he said.

BHAAA will hold this year's dinner on Oct. 18. Money raised will go towards hiring a college athletic recruiting coach at Beverly High, as well as hiring more assistant coaches, said Fenton.

"We can have a college athletic recruiting coach on campus to work with our student athletics that want to play sports at the collegiate level," he said. "We can have more assistant coaches for our teams."

In September, Fenton will step down as president because he was recently elected to the school board. BHAAA's finance chair, David Corwin, will take over as president.

"Under David's leadership, I know he will take BHAAA to new heights," said Fenton. "He has the vision - he knows where we need to be. He's very disciplined and since day one, he's been my partner every step of the way."