

**FRANK CALLEN...** and Girls Club. When we found out about this we met with them on three occasions and expressed our concerns that we would not agree to them not using the name Frank Callen," said Commissioner James Holmes. During the third meeting the group also met with Ronnie Jenkins, Regional Service Director for the national Boys and Girls Club, who sought a win-win situation between the two groups.

The community group feels that Executive Director Vincent Delmonte has not been forthcoming with accurate information on the future plans of the club and that there is a hidden secretive agenda to either get rid of The Frank Callen's Boys and Girls Club or weaken it severely by placing it under an umbrella with other clubs and later closing the doors by claiming the club is not financially solvent.

Not so says Vincent Delmonte, "It is disheartening to hear those kinds of allegations, we've been pretty open with communications with those folks. I am taken aback by this. We informed them that this is a national requirement that the name should begin with 'Boys and Girls'." Delmonte claims that plans to expand the organization began two years ago when the national organization encouraged them to expand into a regional organization. "Only the corporate name will be changed; this building will remain. The Frank Callen's Boys and Girls Club. When we establish other units under the umbrella their name will start with 'Boys and Girls'." The problem with establishing other units is that beyond this community nobody really knows who Frank Callen really is, they don't relate to that name, they relate to their community," stated

Walter Simmons, a retired principal, put into perspective the role the club has played in Savannah: "A long time ago little black girls and boys were harassed by the cops for playing out in the street and on the sidewalks, those kids

had no where to play. Frank Callen, a Juvenile Probationary Officer, saw the need for a boys club in Savannah and he struggled to start one. In 1917 the boys club opened and you will find that many, many boys found this place an oasis," he said.

For former County Commissioner Joe Murray Rivers, the club is personal, he remembers going to the club in the mid 1940s and he knew Frank Callen on a personal basis. Additionally, Rivers has served on the club's board in years past and he remembers the lean times the club faced several years ago when finances dried up. "Right now we only have one boys and girls club in Savannah and that is Frank Callen's. What they have proposed is that we go to a regional structure and what I am saying is that we don't need to do that at the expense of Frank Callen's," said Rivers.

Sam Jones, president of the Frank Callen's Boys and Girls Club Alumni, played basketball under Coach James Holmes and over the years he has consistently volunteered at the club. Jones accuses the board of being insensitive to the needs of the community it serves. "I find it strange that we now have a board that apparently does not understand who they work for, they actually work for the people that attend the club," he said.

Commissioner James Holmes is a little blunter in his assessment of the situation: "In the past we have always heard that they (new neighbors) wanted to purchase the Frank Callen's Boys and Girls Club. If you

notice in the past fifteen years the Beach Institute Neighborhood has changed and you now have residents living there that complain about the children walking through their neighborhood going to the club. I truly think that what we are facing is a backdoor scheme to sell Frank Callen's Boys and Girls Club. You can get rid of a unit quicker than you can a headquarters," he remarked.

"This building has seen its time and eventually we will have to rebuild it," said

Delmonte. The community group feels that if the building is ever demolished it will never be rebuilt and accuses Delmonte of using the existing Frank Callen's Boys Club to launch a regional umbrella organization which will directly threaten the existence of Frank Callen's.

Delmonte, however, says that only the corporate headquarters will assume a new name, nothing at Frank Callen's will change. He also points to his record over the last six years as proof that he can be trusted. When Delmonte took over the organization he made history by becoming the first white director. Since then, though, he has solved the clubs financial problems by bringing in more money through grants, and increased United Way funds. Over the past four years Delmonte has already begun the expansion process by establishing satellite units in Richmond Hill, Kayton Homes, Tatumville, and Coffee Bluff.

In the end, the issue may be resolved by a third party—the national organization. "I did meet with a large group of alumni and I listened to their concerns. We want to do what is best for the children—this should be a win-win situation for everyone involved. When Vince went to the club the club was at the bottom and

to serve more kids. I hope they can sit down and find a way to do what is best for the children," said Ronnie Jenkins, Regional Services Director for the national organization.

Jenkins said that he has recommended naming the regional corporate headquarters in honor of Frank Callen as a way of everyone winning. In the end, regardless of what happens in Savannah, the national headquarters will have to make the final decision. To avoid further controversy, Jenkins said he will recommend that a task force that includes all stakeholders and financial sources convene and iron out the differences before a final name for the regional headquarters is chosen.