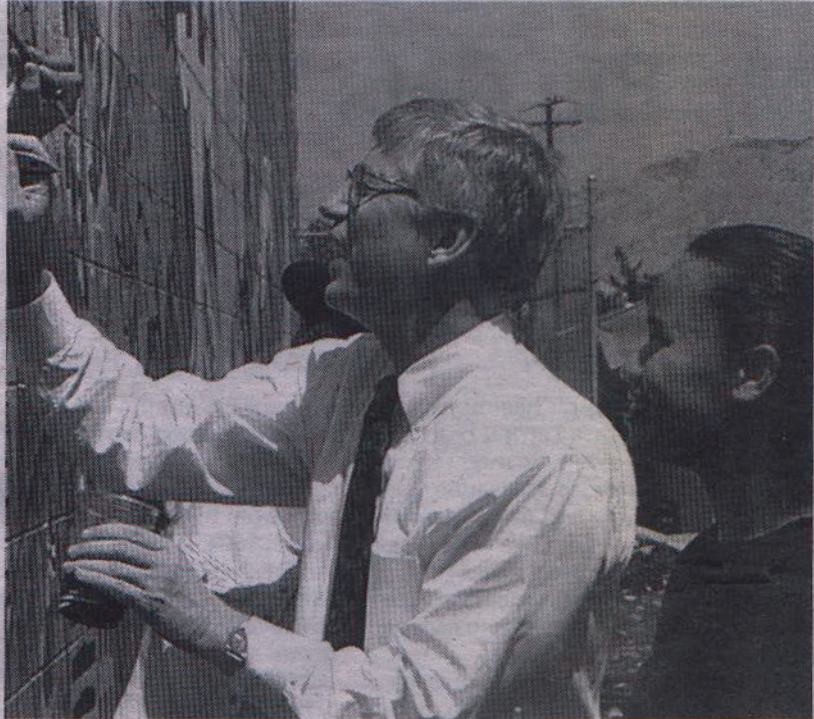


# Salt Lake City's Investment in Kids

YouthCity offers arts, technology and recreation programs

BY ROSS C. "ROCKY" ANDERSON



**A**s a single father for 14 years, I know very well the frustration involved in trying to find nurturing, interesting activities for young people during the hours they are out of school. Individually and as a community, our efforts regarding activities for the after-school and summer hours often determine the future course lives will take.

Just consider that most of the inmates in our prisons (which cost approximately \$25,000 per inmate per year to operate) did not have wholesome things to do during their out-of-school hours and did not have role models whose examples could have led the inmates toward better lives.

Good after-school and summer programs reduce adolescent crime and keep young people from getting on a destructive criminal track. Because of these programs, we have a safer community — and we help build better lives and better families.

Youth programs in Salt Lake City previously consisted of a photo-op fund-raising project called Midnight Basketball and limited youth programs at the Sorenson Center. Since early 2000, the new YouthCity initiative has grown into a city-wide program that offers exceptional opportunities for young people throughout Salt Lake City.

Notwithstanding some detractors on the City Council (two of whom voted for the City to return \$1.2 million that we worked hard to obtain from the U.S. Congress for use in the

YouthCity program), the YouthCity team in Salt Lake City government has achieved much in the past three and a half years. The team:

- Established a first-ever Youth and Family Refugee Program, following the tremendously successful efforts of YouthCity staff members Janet Wolf and Kim Thomas to obtain a federal three-year grant of \$1.3 million from the Office of Refugee Resettlement.
- Helped create five youth murals covering full sides of buildings, three of which are along the TRAX line.
- Collaborated with Salt Lake County, University of Utah, SpyHop Productions, Artspace, Institute for Art and Imagination, State of Utah, Asian Association, International Rescue Committee, Catholic Community Services and Salt Lake City School District in building and expanding youth programs.
- Expanded programs at Sorenson Center and opened new programs at Central City Recreation Center, Glendale Middle School and Northwest Multipurpose Center. Additional expansions (Fairmont Park, Liberty Park and Memory Grove) in the works.
- Commenced an Employment Program, with job fairs and a company mentoring program.
- Provided year-round arts education

and performance opportunities as one of six sites nationwide to host the Kennedy Center Imagination Celebration. (The Steering Committee is comprised of dozens of our community's leading arts and other non-profit organizations.)

- Initiated College Bound mentoring program in partnership with University of Utah, to convey the possibility of a higher education for young people who may not otherwise even entertain the idea. (We are working to expand the partnerships to include Salt Lake Community College, Westminster College and University of Phoenix.)
- Enabled YouthCity Government to participate in projects such as the Youth Summit on Gun Violence, two Youth "Unity Grooves" (gatherings for music and dancing, providing teen musicians venues to play their music), lobbying of City Council on issues of concern to youth, and design of skateboard parks at Jordan and Fairmont Parks.

Salt Lake City is now rich with all sorts of uplifting, interesting, nurturing programs for young people in every part of our city. We have made extraordinary progress. Please help us get the word out. And please let our Council members know how crucial these sorts of programs are for our young people, their families, and our entire community. ♦

Rocky Anderson is the Mayor of Salt Lake City.