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# Utility cuts power then restores it at Boys & Girls Clubs

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By Philip Marcelo

Journal Staff Writer

PROVIDENCE — The Boys & Girls Clubs of Providence had fallen behind on its utility payments, leading National Grid to cut power to its Fox Point headquarters — which also houses a youth center, a swimming pool, a city branch library and a senior center — Wednesday afternoon.

But power was restored Thursday at noon after the club agreed to pay about \$2,000 of the facility's total \$18,000 electric bill, according to club CEO John Brewster.

The Boys & Girls Club has a \$70,000 outstanding debt on electric and natural gas payments for six facilities in the city, North Providence and Charlestown.

The club will launch a fundraising campaign to cover the \$18,000 debt owed on the Fox Point facility, which, under an agreement with the utility company, must be fully paid within 30 days, according to Brewster.

“We don't have the money now, but we're confident that we'll raise \$18,000 and make our commitment to National Grid. This won't be happening again,” said Brewster.

National Grid spokesman David Graves confirmed yesterday that the utility cut off power to the approximately 48,000-square-foot facility at the corner of Ives and Wickenden streets at about 2:15 p.m. on Wednesday after the club failed to pay its bills over a period of time. Graves, however, declined to disclose further details of the issue, saying only that the utility and the club have agreed upon a payment plan.

City Councilor Seth Yurdin, who represents Fox Point, called National Grid's decision to cut off power to the club “pretty disappointing.”

“National Grid should not be shutting down libraries, senior centers and Boys & Girls Clubs in this economic climate,” he said. “These are really important neighborhood institutions that a lot of people use here.”

The 141-year old Boys & Girls Clubs of Providence is the oldest Boys & Girls Club in the nation and the largest in Rhode Island, according to Brewster. But it has fallen on hard times.

Operating revenue has dropped from \$5.5 million in 2005 to \$2.5 million this year due to steady cuts in United Way and state funding. The club has been able to bolster the revenue subsidies with increased fundraising, additional revenue from renting out facilities and endowment support. Still, it has been forced to restrict operating hours to Thursday through Saturday in recent years. "Right now, all nonprofits are in trouble," said Brewster.

The club has been behind on its utility payments for close to a year, but Wednesday was the first time that the utility had cut off power to any of its facilities, according to Brewster. "We've been trying to give what we can," he said.

The Fox Point facility is the primary source of the club's utility debts. About 35 years old and built in a style that is not energy efficient, the Fox Point club is one of the largest facilities the club runs and is the only one that is air-conditioned, according to Brewster.

"Every nonprofit organization has its challenges to remain financially viable in this climate, I just hope that this is just a cash-flow problem and not something more systemic," said Yurdin.

Meanwhile, services at the Fox Point location resumed as scheduled yesterday. Brewster said that no Boys & Girls Club activities were canceled Wednesday, but the Fox Point library branch and the senior center, run by a separate nonprofit entity, were forced to close early.

[pmarcelo@projo.com](mailto:pmarcelo@projo.com)