

BY EINAT PAZ-FRANKEL

"I don't think you're going to make it," a good soul told Episcopal priest Jim Boyd when he was named president of Bridges USA in 1995.

10 years later, the non-profit Bridges has experienced six-fold growth in the number of youth it serves, not to mention the one-of-a-kind, ecologically friendly building the organization erected in Uptown in 2004.

What drove Boyd to become a priest ultimately helped him bring Bridges USA to what it is today — a vital organization that serves 12,000 youth and adults annually.

Wanting to be integrated in the lives of people and supporting them in their spiritual journeys led him to the priesthood, Boyd says.

Studying for his Master of Divinity degree at a unique interfaith seminary brought Boyd even closer to Bridges. His classmates were diverse — Protestant, Catholic and Jewish students learning together to become faith leaders in their respective denominations.

"It was a good preparation for Bridges, which focuses on diversity and leadership," he says.

Bridges USA helps youth and adults reach their potential through experiential education, diversity, leadership and real-world challenges through various programs. Bridges serves youth ages 12-24 in three programs. Its signature program, Bridge Builders, brings together students from all public, private and parochial high schools to lay aside differences and develop Memphis' future leadership.

Work Bridge, the only program for adults, provides career development training for those wishing to enter the work force who need computer and other skills.

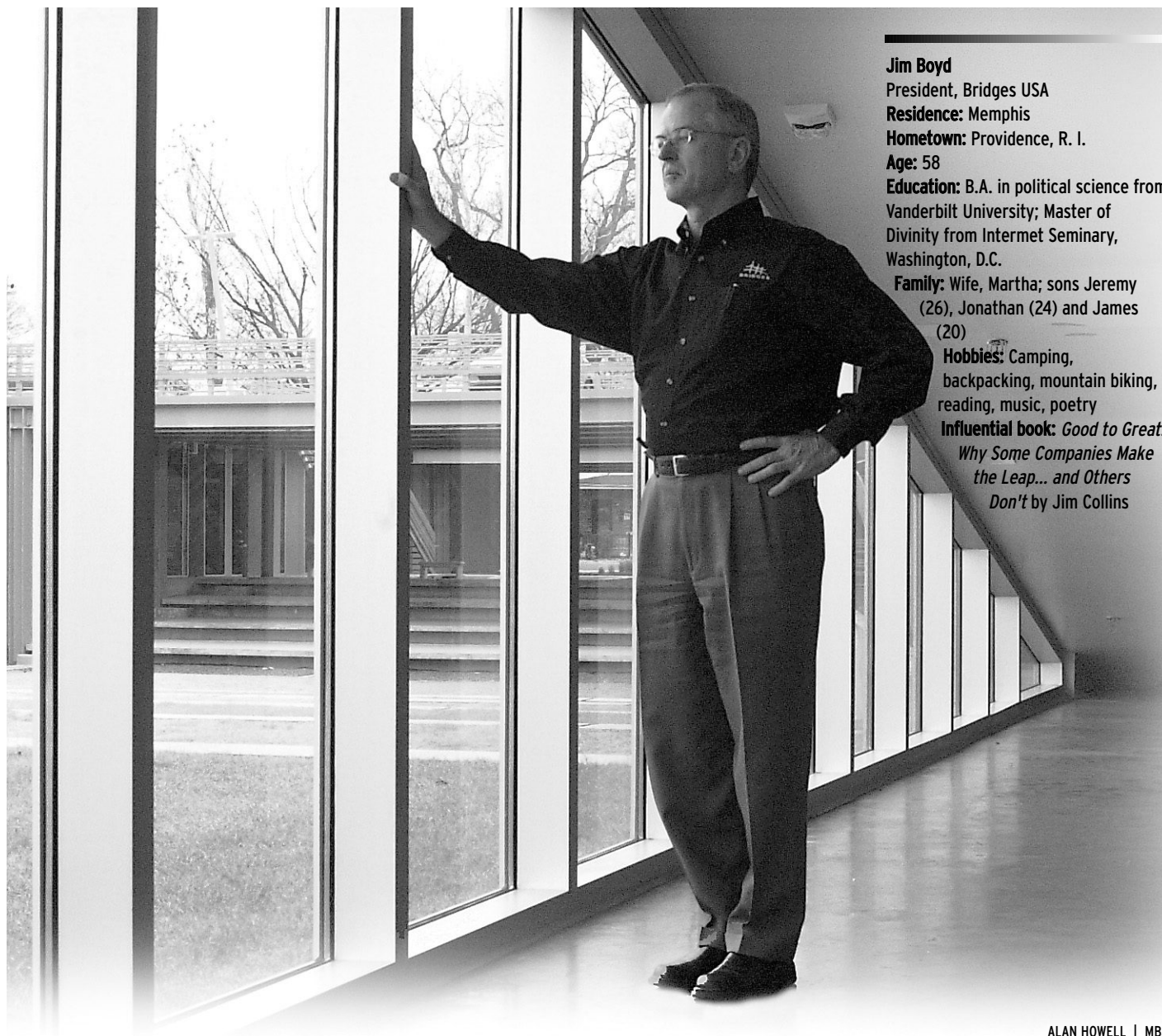
Called Youth Services in 1995, the 30-employee organization with dwindling funds was restructured by Boyd, a process that began in 1995 and ended as the new millennium unfolded.

Boyd had to "let some people go, consolidate positions, eliminate programs and focus on the essential," he says.

It wasn't until 1999 that he was confident Bridges was going to survive, Boyd says.

When Boyd and his colleagues formed a five-year strategic plan in 2000, Bridges USA served less than 2,000 youth and adults per year. In 2005, the organization served some 12,000 with 53 staff and almost the same budget — \$4.1 million, compared with \$3.5 million in 2000.

Bridges managed this by reducing the average cost per student — a little over



Jim Boyd
 President, Bridges USA
 Residence: Memphis
 Hometown: Providence, R. I.
 Age: 58
 Education: B.A. in political science from Vanderbilt University; Master of Divinity from Intermet Seminary, Washington, D.C.
 Family: Wife, Martha; sons Jeremy (26), Jonathan (24) and James (20)
 Hobbies: Camping, backpacking, mountain biking, reading, music, poetry
 Influential book: *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't* by Jim Collins

ALAN HOWELL | MBJ

Building bridges

Jim Boyd resurrects Bridges from extinction, increasing its reach and service capacity

\$1,800 per year per student in 2000, compared to \$274 last year. Boyd also moved the organization away from government grants to private fundraising.

"Government grants can be unpredictable and restrictive," he says. "We needed to create a funding base that will allow us to do what we do best, without needless restrictions or surprises."

Leveraging the organization's re-

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sources was a key strategy for reducing costs, but the pursuit of excellence appears to be the driving force behind Bridges' seamless growth.

"What can we do best?" Boyd asked his staff in the process of restructuring. They all agreed upon "experiential education and adventurous learning," Boyd says. They wanted to see "ordinary kids

do extraordinary things," he says.

From there, the mission was clear. In 2000, Boyd and his staff decided Bridges needed a new facility. In 2004, the state-of-the-art Bridges Center at Auction and Fifth was completed and Bridges moved from its small office in East Memphis to the 55,000-square-foot metal structure that cost \$7.5 million, all raised from donations.

"The 'green' facility was Jim's vision," says Lisa Moore Willis, Bridges vice president of programs. "Our response was 'that would be awesome' and it actually happened — the first 'green' building in Memphis."

Complete with a climbing wall and a high-ropes course, the new building provides opportunities for adolescents to engage in adventurous experiences within a safe learning environment.

And just like climbing a steep wall, every step in the life of an organization can be challenging, especially fundraising and resource manage-

ment, Boyd says.

"We keep marshaling resources to do the best we can with them," he says.

Apparently, Boyd has succeeded in earning the trust of local donors and granting organizations, which keep Bridges going.

"Jim is well respected among donors," says Gid Smith, president of the Community Foundation of Greater Memphis, which connects donors to causes.

In 2005, Bridges received 32 grants totaling \$148,618 from the foundation, according to Vicki Grimes, donor grants officer. Since 2000, Bridges has received more than \$2.1 million from the foundation, she says.

Knowing Boyd for more than two decades, Smith has followed his work closely.

"He does a great job, a needed job," Smith says about Boyd. "Bridges focuses on education, which is a high priority in our community."

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