

***First Appeared in the Grand Traverse Insider, Sunday, April 11, 2010***

## **The New Y – Some Answers**

By Tom Van Deirse, CEO

Since 2007, the Grand Traverse Bay YMCA has been attempting to raise some \$12 million in donations to build a New YMCA. To date we have raised over \$5.3 million. In a recent study, we found there were some questions by community leaders about the project. Here are some answers to some of the question raised by the study about the New Y.

***“I’ve seen the facility plans, and they look very nice. I know the current building is old, but do they really need such a nice, new facility?”***

There is no doubt that the current YMCA facility needs to be replaced. It has hosted more than a quarter of a million usages each year for almost 30 years, and has served the community beyond the typical lifespan of a metal shell building of its type. Further, it is literally sinking into the swamp on which it was built.

YMCA facilities, however, are just *that* – “facilities”. The New Y will be built NOT as a marvel of architecture, but as a functional building to facilitate programs. During the planning process the board of directors took great care to match community need with building size and function. For example, the pool is sized to accommodate 2,000 kids in learn-to-swim programs each year because that is the amount of need that was identified. The tennis center, gyms, fitness center – all were planned to the specifications of need identified by independent market studies. Those needs, and the facilities planned to solve them, are summarized here:

**Need:** 40% of 7<sup>th</sup> graders surveyed could not swim 25 yards to save their life or the life of a friend

**Solution:** The New Y Aquatics Center

**Impact:** 2,000 kids in the five county region will learn to swim each year at The New Y

**Need:** There is no family-oriented full-service recreational facility in our entire five county region

**Solution:** The New Y pool, gym, youth fitness, adult fitness, senior fitness, tennis center, teen & family center

**Impact:** 4,000 additional families from throughout the region will enjoy The New Y

**Need:** Youth obesity, leading to Type II diabetes, is on the rise, and regional health is on the decline

**Solution:** The New Y fitness center with dedicated youth fitness, adult fitness, and senior fitness areas

**Impact:** 1,000 families categorized as “not yet fit” will participate in health & fitness services at The New Y

**Need:** Teens need a fun, safe, positive place to grow

**Solution:** The New Y teen center

**Impact:** 1,000 additional teens from the Grand Traverse Bay area will have a place of their own at The New Y

**Need:** There is no regional full-service facility where everyone is welcome, regardless of ability to pay

**Solution:** The Y’s “No One Denied” financial assistance policy will carry forward to The New Y

**Impact:** 1,000 additional families will benefit from the expanded charitable services of the YMCA

What all of these statements have in common is that the need is real, vital, and urgent. The YMCA is the most qualified organization to solve these community needs, with the expertise already in hand, but what is lacking are facilities. For example, the YMCA is nationally the largest provider of swim lessons, so because so many local kids can’t swim, we began teaching in hotel pools, but we have to close down during the summer

because of lack of availability, and even during the off-peak season we are limited to less than 100 kids among the thousands that lack adequate life-saving skills. We need The New Y now!

***“I would like to see the YMCA act more like a Christian organization – put the ‘C’ back in YMCA.”***

The Young Men’s Christian Association began as a bible study group for wayward boys in London in 1844. Soon after the first Y opened in Boston in 1851, YMCA leaders realized that an attractive, real-life, and hands-on way to instill Christian values was through programs such as camping (did you know that the Boy Scouts grew out of the YMCA?), swimming, child care, and youth sports.

That same emphasis on Christian values is alive and well at the Grand Traverse Bay YMCA today, and is at the heart of all of our programming. Our board of directors opens each meeting with prayer (we have a retired pastor on board), and we use Christian values to guide our decisions, which are ultimately based on our mission statement – “to put Judeo Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind, and body for all”. Our sports teams pray before each competition (gymnastics, lacrosse, soccer, tennis), and our camp kids are taught to pray each day. All of our programs are focused as much on values education as on sports skills training. Our new Y Day Care Center features a Christian curriculum, and The New Y will feature a chapel as a further sign to all who participate that we are a people and a place of faith.

Nationally, the YMCA has recognized its subtle slide toward secularism, and is taking steps to amend that through its brand revitalization campaign, but at the Grand Traverse Bay YMCA we have always sought to capitalize the ‘C’ in YMCA.

*The New YMCA Capital Campaign is seeking more donations from the community in order to build. Online donations can be received at [www.4good4ever.org](http://www.4good4ever.org).*