



A HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF THE GRAND TRAVERSE BAY YMCA

In the beginning, a group of individuals concerned about the youth and families of the Grand Traverse area recognized the needs for a YMCA. Dr. Millie Herkner [Ballance] provided much of the inspiration and leadership for these early organizers who included Austin and Kay VanStratt, Gil Voss, Jim and Doris Allen, Bob and Betty Bursian, Bob Heater, George DeWeese, and Bill Lynch.

The earliest recorded event was a 'kickoff' breakfast on January 23, 1962. Hosted by Fran O'Heren at her Townhouse Restaurant, these leaders considered the possibility and means of establishing a YMCA. In early February a steering committee was formed, headed by Bob Heater. With the help of Dick Hatt of the Jackson YMCA [a friend of the VanStratts] and Harold Baker of the State YMCA of Michigan, the ground work was started. By November of '62 progress was sufficient for the convening of an interim Board of Directors.

Dr. Herkner presided over the final stages of the YMCA's creation. Moving forward with a contributed budget of \$17,000, a working Board, and a solid group of volunteers, the final decision to apply for a YMCA Charter was reached the following year.

At a dinner on February 6, 1963 at the TCHS cafeteria, 150 people heard first-hand the announcement of the formal organization of the Grand Traverse Bay YMCA. **hereafter referred to as the GTBY** On March 13th the interim and permanent Boards met jointly. The State YMCA of Michigan, the sponsor, was represented by John Wolf, Secretary of the State Y Central District. The Charter from the National YMCA was received in April, and the first business meeting of the Charter Board of Directors was convened. The Board roster was: President, Austin VanStratt; Vice-President, Dr. Ted Cline; Secretary, Dr. Millie Herkner; Treasurer, Gill Voss; Members – Jim Allen, Larry Bankey, Bob Bursian, Dr. Tom Cajagis, George Weese, Bill Faris, Dorothy Hall, Ken Hughes, Herb Joslin, Bill Lynch, Dr. William Olsen, Dutch Schroterboer, Lew Walton, and Rex Watson. The office manager and a key YMCA worker was Betty Bursian.

The first GTBY office was on East Front Street, second floor, over the Goodyear Auto Service Center. The first General Secretary [later titled Executive Director, and today CEO] was Wally Hunt. His work began in September, 1963. First year expenditures exceeded \$8,000, leaving a small reserve for the next year. The first annual meeting was held February 20, 1964 at the TCHS cafeteria. Membership topped 400 units and the new budget topped \$16,000. Austin VanStratt stayed on as President in 1964 and was

succeeded by Jim Allen in 1965. Millie Herkner served as President in 1966 and into 1967. In February of that year, Wally Hunt stepped down and Hank Pratt was hired. The budget now exceeded \$21,000. Glen Anderson stepped in as President in mid-1967 and served through 1968. That year the GTBY became a participant in the Community Chest [now the United Way]. As the budget was now in excess of \$34,000, the dream of a facility brightened.

In consultation with Larry Savage, City Manager; Bob Bach, City Planner; and some research by JJ&R of Ann Arbor, the GTBY took it's first serious look at building sites. Among those considered were the [to be] 'Open Spaces', the east shore of Boardman Lake, and the old Fair Grounds [now the Civic Center]. During that year the Paul Easling Foundation was created to plan, fund and build a community swimming pool. A capital campaign to also build a YMCA Facility was part of a larger master plan. When that plan was shelved, the GTBY was given and accepted the opportunity to lease, occupy, and operate the new Easling Pool. In 1969, under President Pete Dendrinis, a lease was signed between the GTBY and the Easling Foundation. Hank Pratt left YMCA service for the private sector, and at year's end Stan Susan, out of Y World Service, became the GTBY's next Professional.

Pool operations began in early 1970 during President Bill Thomas' tenure, and continued through Chuck Ballance's 1971 term. These years were filled with optimism and hard work, but were soon followed by frustration and ultimately disappointment. Stan Susan retired from YMCA work in late 1971. The GTBY continued to operate the pool into 1972, Hank Johnson's first year as President. Due to events and circumstances largely beyond the control of the GTBY, the pool was not a successful enterprise, either financially or operationally. The lease was terminated and the pool closed. The City Recreation Department came forward and reopened the pool, but that arrangement didn't last long. After a few short months, the City retreated. In the end the pool was deeded to the County and the Easling Foundation was absorbed into the newly formed Traverse Area Foundation.

1972 was the nadir of the GTBY. The office was moved to the basement floor of the Kelderhouse Building at the SW corner of Front and Boardman. Into this 400sq ft space were moved a desk, tables, chairs, a typewriter, a mimeo machine, some file cabinets, a telephone, and a part-time receptionist/secretary. And there was no professional director. The Community Chest allocation was reduced to \$3,500 on a one year probationary basis. With these few dollars, some supporting contributions, and some program income the GTBY struggled to continue.

1973 was the turnaround year. Working with Jack Belshaw from the Regional Office in Columbus, Ohio, the GTBY linked up with the State YMCA of Michigan. Don Vreeland, the Executive Director of the State Y's Northern District, was relocated to Traverse City. The GTBY suspended its Charter, became an affiliate of the State Y, and purchased half of Don's time for local operations. The GTBY was now under the charter of the State Y. This relationship provided the foundation upon which the rebuilding process could begin. The future again looked promising.

In 1974 the office was moved again, to a small wood-frame house at 932 E. Eighth Street. Caryl "Tav" Tavener served as President, and was re-elected in 1975. These were important years as the GTBY rebuilt its programs and credibility. "Tav" and Don ably let the way.

Always on the look out for better accommodations, in 1976 under President Curt Germany, the possibility of merging operations with the BoGi Club was explored. However, the Bo-Gi board elected to disband and the matter ended.

Dr. Lornie Kerr assumed the chair in 1977 and continued leading the rebuilding process.

In 1978, during Dave Kellogg's term, a lease was signed for a warehouse-type metal building with some built-in office space. This became the first Family Y Center where a variety of in-house programs could be offered.

During the 1979 term of Doug Read, Don Vreeland became the GTBY's full time Executive Director. The affiliation with the State Y continued, but now the State Y paid for Don's time when he worked on a State Y program.

Amy Joslin was at the helm in 1980 and 1981. During her term the Logan Racquet Center went up for sale. An earnest attempt to engineer a purchase was unsuccessful. However, valuable experience was gained for future developments.

1982 was Doug Bishop's year, and it was a particularly busy one. That spring, the office and equipment were moved to the Rajkovich Physical Education center on the NMC Campus. Don Vreeland retired from YMCA work in June, and Tom Finnegan stepped in as interim Executive Director. In September the GTBY's Charter was reinstated and it regained its status as an independent YMCA. The formal affiliation with the State YMCA of Michigan was terminated, while a very good working relationship was maintained which continues to this day. Later in the year Gary Peterson was hired as the next Executive Director to come on board in January, 1983.

Tom McIntyre started his two year term in 1983. Growth and development continued. Although a joint effort with Munson Medical Center through its 'Vital Choice' program to acquire the Logan Racquet Center stalled, a later arrangement with Asgard Enterprises clicked. They purchased the Center in early 1985, and in August an agreement was signed whereby it would be operated by the YMCA. The GTBY moved into the facility in September, cleaned it up, modified it to multi-purpose use, and opened for business in October.

During the next two years under Bill Northway's Presidency, the GTBY experienced unprecedented growth. Programs were expanded and services were added to an extent only dreamed of before.

The momentum continued as Peggy Zachman became President in 1987. However, internal circumstances came to light which prompted the resignation of Executive Director Gary Peterson. Peggy stepped in and became an 'executive' President, keeping things moving forward in a hands-on manner until an interim Director could be found while a formal search for a new Y-Professional was conducted. As good fortune would have it, Willard Baker, a retired public school district superintendent living in Suttons Bay was asked to take the job, and accepted the challenge. With his special abilities, President Zachman's strong and constant leadership, a dedicated executive committee and board, a loyal and able staff, and a supportive community, the GTBY emerged from this difficult time intact, and in some ways, stronger than ever.

Special mention must be made of the crucial work of Bruce Reavley, Tom McIntyre, and Michael Zenn during these troublesome days. They tackled the root problem and led the way to its solution.

Not entirely by coincidence, Bruce Reavley was elected President in 1988. The first order of business was the hiring of a full time Director. John Fass emerged from the search process, accepted the post, and was on the job in September. As an expression of the GTBY's appreciation and gratitude for his excellent service, Bill Baker was made a life-member of the Association; a historic first. With operations solidly back on track, Bruce's second term advanced program scope and quality.

A revised Mission Statement was adopted, and an updated strategic plan for maximization of internal and external resources was instituted. During Bruce's tenure, the GTBY matured into a more focused and businesslike organization.

George Freeman presided in 1990. Progress continued as the budget nudged \$500,000. At the same time the ageing of the building was becoming apparent. The need for repairs and improvements was clear. Maintenance was becoming more costly, and our landlord was reluctant to invest in the building. Therefore, a capital improvement campaign would be needed in the not too distant future.

President Ralph Soffredine took over in 1991, and under his leadership the GTBY again took a hard look at its mission and role in the community. An open workshop was held at the Olson Center [NMC] with a cross-section of area leaders present. The GTBY was encouraged by the strong support and encouragement of this body. This was key to seizing a late-year opportunity. Asgard was looking for a way out of ownership, as it was becoming a financial burden. The feasibility of a purchase by the GTBY was determined, and negotiations between Asgard, Michigan National Bank [the mortgage holder], and First of America were begun late that year. By fall of 1992, negotiations were successful. Necessary environmental studies were completed and a purchase agreement for \$150,000 was signed in October 1992, and the deal was closed. For the first time in its history, the GTBY owned its own home!

1992 was to have been Michael Zenn's presidential year. Unfortunately [for the Y, not him] an upward career move took him away from the area. However, good fortune

returned as Carol Bell stepped up and led the GTBY for two very productive years. Some highlights: First and foremost was, of course, the purchasing of the facility. The package included the building, the outdoor tennis courts, and the 40 acres south along the Boardman River; instituting a 'Latchkey' program of before and after school child care; forming an Advisory Council of former board members and other local leaders; and a capital improvement campaign [1993] to fund the needed improvements identified in 1990. With the \$100,000 raised, a conference area was created, the business offices were reorganized and expanded, the racquet ball courts were refurbished, the men's showers, sauna and lavatories were rebuilt, some new carpet was laid, and there was some general touching up.

Later in the year Empire National Bank deeded a 3 acre parcel of land on the Western boundary, just south of the building. This rounded out the so called 'South 40'.

The budget now easily exceeded \$500,000. On-ward and up-ward!

Hank Johnson followed Carol Bell in 1994 as President. A major capital campaign was still in the talking stage. Site selection remained an elusive issue. The present location, according to outside advisors, has a preponderance of negatives but as yet an alternative site had not appeared. There were serious discussions on adding indoor tennis courts. The tennis patrons led the charge, but it was decided to preserve these energies and resources for a campaign for a new full-service facility. A fitness center was opened in October. A full range of exercise machines greatly enhanced the offerings to the actively health conscious. Again, a strategic planning retreat was held. These sessions seem to have become a biennial event. It doesn't hurt to review mission, goals and strategies from time to time, keeping them alive in the minds of the veterans, and inspiring the new volunteers. A major move was judged to be 2-3 years away. However, late in the year there was some informal talk about a Parks and Recreation idea to build a comprehensive community service center which would encompass all non-profit human service and fitness/recreation agencies; more on this later.

Ed Boetcher stepped up in 1995. The upward growth curve steadily continued. Scope and quality of programs stayed upward bound, a quarterly newsletter was instituted, and the budget broke through 600K. The Pop Warner football people asked the GTBY to sponsor and run their program. This would turn out to be a major addition to the youth program. Civic leaders and interested parties continued to discuss the Parks and Recreation's plan for a multi-agency, multi purpose compound. Nothing solid yet.

Scott Bosch occupied the top chair in 1996 and 1997. While the Parks and Recreation conversations continued, the GTBY persevered in the quest for its own facility. A Development Study Committee was formed. Based on consultation with Y-National, the Michigan MRC [Management Resource Center] and other advisors, a feasibility study was conducted which suggested that a 6-8 million goal was achievable, absent a Parks & Recreation campaign. However the community leader's task force, known as the "People for Parks" decided to launch a \$50 million bond issue campaign to build the multi-purpose community center. The centerpiece was to be a full service aquatic, fitness, and

recreation facility managed by the GTBY. This proposal bore a strange resemblance to the Easling Pool deal back in 1970-71. The proposal had a fatal flaw, an error of omission. In the haste to get it on the ballot, 'People for Parks' had not yet selected a building site. So, it was presented without this key ingredient. The proposal went down in flames by a 2-1 vote in the November election. Throughout all this excitement and activity GTBY growth continued unabated. Latchkey had become a nearly \$200,000 item in the 1996 \$900,000 budget. In 1997 the budget exceeded \$1,000,000.

1998 was Ken Petterson's year. The GTBY initiated computerization of its operation. Latchkey grew to 26 sites [schools] and extended to Kalkaska, Glen Lake, Kingsley, and Elk Rapids sporting a budget of \$250,000. On the issue of a new facility site consideration, the present location was eliminated as an option. Ground water level made it unsuitable. Other sites still on the table were US 31 S., 3 Mile Road, Silver Lake Road, State Hospital/Engstrom School property, NMC property, and Coast Guard property. And the search went on.

John Fass announced he had accepted a position as Executive Director of a new YMCA in Perrysburg, Ohio. John served the GTBY for 10 years and served it well. The ½ million dollar budget doubled during his tenure. Thank you, John! The title of the top staff person was changed to CEO from Executive Director. Dave Heims, a retired YMCA Executive, ably kept watch during the search for the next CEO.

In 1999 and 2000 Dan Druskovitch occupied the top spot. The search committee completed its work and a new CEO [Bill McCallister] was hired; start date February 22nd. He walked in April citing "Family" considerations". Enter Pat Rode, former CEO State YMCA of Michigan and Director of Camp Hayo-Went-Ha as interim Director #2, a very fortunate development. As the search for a new CEO resumed, Dan and Pat, along with a capable staff and a patient Board, kept things moving forward and upward. Later in the year the search ended with the discovery of Tom VanDeinse, a recognized tennis teaching professional with extensive experience managing YMCA-like facilities. [YMCA professional certification would be determined in due course] He met with and was strongly endorsed by the staff. The Board approved his hire in November, and he took over in December. Tom had to deal with two major program issues out of the box, both of which among other concerns, had significant budgetary implications. First, the startup and management of the aquatics program at Kalkaska's new KALISEUM. Second, the co-opting by TCAPS of all GTBY latchkey sites in their elementary schools. Both matters were nicely navigated.

Early initiatives were several and significant. A Corporate Advisory Committee was created to support the new corporate component of the Invest in Youth scholarship fund-raising campaign, which formerly solicited only individuals. A Pro [Logo] shop was opened in the lobby for sale of Y-gear and sports supplies, and the fitness center equipment was upgraded.

The quest for a new, full facility Y continued. The Commanding Officer of the Coast Guard station accepted a position on the Board of Directors. This was viewed as an

important strategy in the search for the site of a new YMCA, and so it turned out. It must be added here that the GTBY benefited in many other ways, having the Coast Guard Station's Commanding Officer on board, so to speak. [nautical lingo] Each in turn brought skill, experience, ideas, and dedication to the work of the Board. In an earlier action, the Federal Government deeded the open property on the Coast Guard installation South of Parson's Road and East of Airport Access Road to TCAPS. However, a reversionary clause prevented its use by any other agency. In 2000 a process was set in motion to remove that clause, permitting its use by the GTBY. With the help of Congressman Bart Stupac, the Coast Guard officials, and TCAPS, legislation was written which would free TCAPS to allow non-profits to use the property, with the GTBY to be the primary partnering agency. Any change in the law would be delayed until late 2002, largely due to the 9/11 crisis.

Further strategic planning was conducted, but this time with a renewed sense of urgency. A five year critical path was outlined which included the creation of a full time staff position for marketing and development, sale of the property, architectural services, and a new feasibility study based on new circumstances. The GTBY encountered a speed bump of sorts when it found itself involved in an all-agency think-tank sponsored by the United Way and Rotary Charities. The object of these deliberations was to find a way for all agencies to benefit and participate in the new status of the so-called 'Coast Guard Property'. Discussions continued for more than a year. They came up with an estimated price tag of \$50 million for a facility to house them all with the GTBY as the centerpiece. Sound familiar? From there the project was finessed in a number of ways to reduce costs. But, one by one, agencies opted out, either unable to justify their costs or unwilling to participate fully in fund raising. Ultimately the proposal was abandoned. The exercise had been initiated because at the time it appeared to be "the right way to do it". Apparently it was not a serious goal of any given non-profit, but of the organizers, and like a rudderless ship it ran aground.

2001, under the leadership of Mike Comstock, was another busy year. Rebuilding the Latchkey program had high priority. Early in the year the KALISEUM was struggling with serious financial problems. It closed in March and GTBY's aquatic program was gone. Attention was redirected to gymnastics. A full range of quality equipment was purchased from Central Michigan University and a starter program was offered in-house. The first annual golf outing was held in early May, a chilly but solid success. Continuing on the critical path, an appraisal was obtained, coming in at a pleasantly surprising \$1.15 million. Garfield Township planned to purchase the package, land and building, with funds from a Land Conservancy grant and GDO Investments. In April, GTBY was greatly pleased and encouraged by a very favorable Record Eagle editorial regarding its community service and plans for a new facility. The House Bill removing the reversionary clause was passed. Now the Senate version remained. The GTBY waited expectantly.

President Comstock's second term built solidly on the first. A building for a full service gymnastics program was leased. It was an immediate success. Garfield Township signed a purchase option, contingent on funding from the Land Conservancy and GDO

investments. Healthy Kids Day, under the direction of Dr. Terry Stockwell, took a quantum leap forward combining the fine Health Fair with summer program signups. JC Penny awarded the GTBY its national child care 'After School Award'; a significant achievement. In May, on Armed Forces Day, the GTBY began offering complimentary memberships to active duty military personnel and their families. The "collaboration project" came off the shelf briefly. The United Way passed, but Rotary Charities persevered. After publishing the results of a feasibility study by Baron-Mallow, the remaining agencies of the Building Partnership Committee retired. However, this was not the last to be heard of this matter. "Collaboration" wasn't dead yet. Rotary Charities created the "Building Partnership Task Force" for yet another look. Various configurations and event plans [Phasing] were examined. Results, negative.

At this point the GTBY decided it could no longer wait for these efforts to produce a workable plan, and adopted a go-it-alone policy. A verbal prompt from TCAPS's Superintendent suggesting forward movement with the plan gave added incentive for the quest. Back at the main GTBY facility, a new phone system was installed, the computer system was upgraded, a school bus was purchased with a JC Penny grant, and the logo shop continued as an asset. In October, the Corporate Advisory Committee hosted the first annual invitational 'Invest In Youth' luncheon at the TC Country Club for corporate and business leaders. Sponsored by Comstock Construction and Schmuckal Oil, it gave a powerful thrust to this traditional fundraiser. Interviews to identify a capital campaign service ended in November with the selection of Jerold Panas, Linzy & Partners. An essential milestone on the critical path to a new Y was passed in December when the senate approved the legislation to remove that pesky clause. When President Bush signed it into law, this issue was gladly removed from the check-off list.

Teri Stockwell relieved the watch in 2003. Although 'collaboration' was over, the GTBY continued to pursue a relationship with the Boys and Girls Club on the basis of the common mission of serving underprivileged youth. Efforts to sell the property progressed as the deal with GDO was closed on the building and immediate environs. The GTBY will continue to have full and unrestricted use of the building. Also, the Land Conservancy grant for the purchase of the 'South 40' was approved, though not yet funded. Some program information and stats: The two outdoor tennis courts nearest the river were refurbished and adapted for use for pickleball and roller hockey; Membership units exceeded 1,000; total members topped 3,000; nearly ¼ million building usages were recorded; gymnastics grew to over 300 participants per week; 1,000+ kids played Pop Warner football; 433 volunteers and over 24,000 volunteer hours were logged; 600+ kids in summer day camp; 1,200 in youth soccer; adult basketball; youth baseball; and the list goes on of many, many other specialty programs. This extensive lineup is not unique to this year.

The GTBY has for some time had an extensive offering, but with a new, full facility it could be expected at a minimum to double or even triple its operation. New discussions were held with the United Way, Youth for Christ, Boys and Girls Club, and Youth and Family Services to explore the feasibility of a Teen Center. All the while the GTBY continues the Teen Dances and the youth scholarship program.

Perhaps the defining event of the year 2003 was the preparation for and execution of the capital campaign feasibility study. The case statement was “Water, water everywhere, and not a kid to spare”. The interviews were supervised by Jeorald Panas, Linzy & Partners. Fifty-two interviews were conducted with the formal report scheduled for January, 2004. The search continued for a Director of Development. The annual Volunteer Recognition event was held in December.

2004, Teri’s second year, started out with the sobering report of the feasibility study. The study tested for 12 million, but 6 million was identified as probable, with another 3 possible given certain conditions. Revision of the conceptual plan and campaign design was immediately undertaken with the objective of having them meet at 9 million. It was an exercise in determining the “ins’ and ‘outs’ of the total plan. Major among these was the debate over the issue of a competitive vs. a recreational/therapeutic pool. The assumption was that one would have to be deferred. An important part of the readiness efforts are the one-on-one informational luncheons with community leaders. Their purpose was to educate key people on the GTBY’s operation, and to enlist their support and advocacy. Conversations with several potential major donors were promising, as work on the check-off lists moved forward. Two other important chapters in Teri’s second term were the funding of the Land Conservancy grant and the hiring of Lance Mead as the new Director of Development. The former means that the GTBY will begin with 1 million in its Capital Campaign account. The latter provides much needed added horsepower to campaign operations, not to mention strengthening the GTBY’s forward moving image. Mention must be made of the good offices of Garfield Township. It was through their vision that the sale was realized. Moreover, an agreement was reached with them whereby the GTBY could continue to use the properties in a business-as-usual manner for as long as needed.

As the year end approached, the urgency to complete the Capital Campaign self-assessment by January 1st became more acute. 2005 will be without question a decisive year for the GTBY. By year’s end it will be likely be known whether this long standing dream and today’s quest will be achieved.

Looking slightly ahead, March 3, 2005 will be the kickoff of the “quiet” phase of the campaign. This will be announced at a combined Annual Meeting of the Association and Awards Dinner.

Hope and Faith will be in attendance.