



YMCA of Greater Springfield



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



CALL TO THE CAUSE

JANUARY 2012

DEAR FRIEND OF THE Y:

Happy New Year! I hope your holidays were relaxing and you are rejuvenated for the year ahead. This year, some things will stay the same; our focus on healthy living, youth development, and social responsibility and our commitment to building One Association, becoming the Partner Y and the Third Place in the 14 cities and towns we serve; and creating VIVID (Viable, Impactful, Visible, Inspirational and Deliverable) programs. Others will change, like our expanded role in becoming a more family-centered organization, a place for every member of the family, in every community we serve. For example, in the coming year, you will notice a greater emphasis on programs for seniors and greater attention on special events that involve every member of the family.

We will do this even as we continue to focus on addressing the needs of our youth – regardless of where they live and what constraints they face. Because of this renewed commitment to their total wellbeing, I have chosen the Y’s holistic approach to youth development as the hot topic for this month. In Springfield, where the high drop-out rate and poor MCAS scores persist, the Y remains one of the largest providers of educational programming outside of the public school system. As such, we will continue to focus on literacy, tutoring, college preparation and access, and job and life-skills through our learning centers. In the cities and towns where educational achievement is not a glaring problem, we will continue to focus on leadership skills, teambuilding, and conflict resolution that support all youth regardless of race or socio-economic status.



In the coming year, we will also pilot various ad-hoc initiatives that reflect our holistic approach to youth development. For example, the President’s office is currently promoting a pilot project



called “CEO for a Day,” which involves a growing collaboration with the Rebecca Johnson School located in the Mason Square neighborhood of Springfield. I have asked the school’s fifth graders to write on an essay on what they imagine the role of the CEO to be. One male and one female winner will be chosen as the CEO for the day. They will be asked to dress the part and shadow me on January 25th by attending meetings and even conducting the board meeting scheduled for that day! The goal of this exercise, which supports the

mind, body, and spirit, is to give these students not only a role model who looks like them but also a chance to envision themselves in a role of executive leadership.

Going forward, we hope to raise awareness about our existing programs and sponsor new short-term initiatives that address a wide-range of issues faced by our children and youth, including obesity, bullying, sex and drug use, and etc. Given the prevalence and seriousness of these issues, we have our work cut out for us. But, I believe, we also have a strong community of adults (staff, volunteers, members and friends) who are equally committed to nurturing and strengthening the next generation, with our three areas of focus; healthy living, youth development and social responsibility. A small sample of our recent accomplishments is below:

THREE FOCUS AREAS:

HEALTHY LIVING

SWIM THE ENGLISH CHANNEL CHALLENGE AT SCANTIC VALLEY Y

Thanks to the efforts of aquatics supervisor Jim McGrath, the Scantic Valley Y launched an aquatics challenge that has been very well received. (By the end of December, 75 people had registered.) Kicked off on December 1, 2011 and ending February 14, 2012, the Swim the English Channel Challenge is a 22-mile swim that is pushing participants to increase their endurance and exciting their imagination at the same time. Who wouldn't like to boast that they can swim the English Channel? In fact, this major feat has already been tackled by one Linda Palmioli, who is a LIVESTRONG participant and cancer survivor. Ms. Palmioli completed the swim in just 14 days (two others completed it in 20 days) and is now working on the return trip. Congratulations to her and the others and best of luck for the swim home!



Linda Palmioli made the swim across the Channel in 14 days. We will continue to root for her as she makes her way home.

LUNCHEON FOR ACTIVE OLDER ADULTS AT THE DOWNTOWN SPRINGFIELD Y

On Friday, December 30, the Downtown Springfield Y hosted a Senior Potluck Luncheon to nurture our existing community of active older adults who faithfully participate in the Y's Monday, Wednesday, and Friday low-impact aerobic and beginner strength training classes with instructor Nancy Carter. More than a dozen people attended the luncheon to share their ideas about future programs and events for this group. They reported to Diana Giraud, Group Exercise Coordinator who organized the event, that they would like to start a tradition of quarterly potluck luncheons, increase the number of stretching classes offered, and plan summer cookouts and trips. We welcome their input and look forward to their growing presence.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

SCANTIC VALLEY'S SCHOOL'S OUT PROGRAM PARTNERS WITH MINNECHAUG HIGH SCHOOL

In December, the Scantic Valley School's Out program launched a new partnership with the Minnechaug Regional High School which will introduce high school teens as leaders and mentors in the Y's after school program at Stony Hill Elementary. Made possible by the High School's community service curriculum, which allows students to earn credit for completing community service projects, this new partnership will give the high school volunteers an opportunity to plan and implement individual and group activities for Stony Hill elementary students. In the process, they will gain valuable work and life experience teaching, motivating, and inspiring children.



Minnechaug high school volunteers in the Y's Stony Hill after school program bring smiles to the children with their skills and enthusiasm.

MEALS WITH SANTA AT THE SCANTIC VALLEY AND DOWNTOWN SPRINGFIELD YS

In December, the Scantic Valley and Downtown Springfield Family Centers each sponsored a meal with Santa. On December 10, the Scantic Valley Y celebrated its 8th Annual Breakfast with Santa. One of the holiday events key to family-centered programming, the breakfast has become a tradition with generations coming together to enjoy the festivities. After a healthy breakfast, children and parents talk to and take pictures with Santa and Mrs. Claus. If they are not afraid, the children sit on the big guy's lap to discuss their wish list and read letters for his ears only. The event is also an opportunity for Scantic Valley members and friends to reconnect with teens from the Key Club at the Minnechaug High School, who traditionally help out with making and serving breakfast.

Five days later, on December 15, the Downtown Springfield Y hosted its Dinner with Santa event. Attended by nearly 200 members and guests, the Dinner with Santa event featured a pasta meal and photos with the white-bearded gent. An annual event, the dinner is part of a series of yearly events designed to provide a safe and affordable night out for the family. Other events include Healthy Kids Day in April, the Halloween Spooktacular in October and Member Appreciation days throughout the year.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS AT THE Y

Every Christmas the YMCA of Greater Springfield sponsors an Adopt-a-Family program where Y members, friends, and staff adopt a family for whom they purchase presents. This year the Y was able to grant Christmas wishes to 14 families. The families are very grateful for this assistance. One mother wrote: "Thanks for one of the greatest Christmases my children ever had!" A Dad told us that the look on his son's face when he opened his presents was priceless. "God bless you all at the YMCA!"

We were able to increase our generosity 10-fold with a major donation of toys from Baystate Health and Toys for Tots. A few days before the holiday, we received word that our neighbor and community partner would be donating about 1,800 toys to benefit the families of our Ys! As a result of their generosity, we were able to help needy families and replenish supplies in our learning centers. A very special thanks to our friends across the street. We appreciate you!



Y families were very grateful for the gift of toys from members, volunteers (including board members), and staff.

“WHY THE Y”

Our Y family is constantly inspired by the impact and action stories we hear from our members and staff. These stories reinforce our commitment to members, participants and community, this month's story is below:

MOCHA MEN AND THE TASTE OF MOCHA

After persisting through a year of changes, the Men of Color Health Awareness (MOCHA) initiative closed the year on a high note! To celebrate their accomplishments of new leadership and high ratings from the Massachusetts Department of Health, the leaders, mentors, and participants of the program planned and hosted a successful Taste of MOCHA on Saturday, December 10th. A combination health fair and holiday boutique, the event showcased health programs and local businesses, giving them opportunity to describe their services and sell their products. More than 200 men and their families attended the event which also included a graduation ceremony about 25 men. Graduates received completion certificates with great pride, and many plan to continue their training to become MOCHA mentors by completing an additional 10-12-week session based on leadership principles. Congratulations to the MOCHA graduates! These men have made significant lifestyle changes and are determined to maintain and share their healthy habits. We are very proud of the hard work these gentlemen have done over the past months to make themselves even better and make MOCHA successful. We appreciate your commitment to improving your health, as well as the health of our community.



A Taste of MOCHA marked a year of accomplishment and pride for MOCHA participants and supporters.

The story above is an example of the relationships that can be built with our dedicated volunteers and staff with support from the family. It's not just one participant we form relationships with, but with families.

For more inspiration - please visit our [website](#), like us on [facebook](#) and follow us on [twitter](#).