



NOT YOUR DADDY'S Y

AN EXPANDING YMCA OF CENTRAL KENTUCKY
RESPONDS TO CHANGING NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

By Vickie Mitchell

When David Martorano was hired three years ago as president and CEO of the YMCA of Central Kentucky, one of his first jobs was to revive the nonprofit organization's plans to build a new Y in the Hamburg area of Lexington.

Any doubts he may have had about Lexington's enthusiasm for the project were quickly erased by meetings he had with two people — former Keeneland Association chairman James E. "Ted" Bassett III and Bryan Raisor, managing director of Assured Partners NL.

Bassett had served as the honorary chairman of the 2004-05 steering committee for the Hamburg YMCA, but a few years in, the project was shelved because of the economic downturn.

Martorano met with Bassett at Keeneland to talk about the Hamburg Y, and as he took his leave, Bassett handed him an apple. "He said, 'I want you to help the health of this community. This is to remind you to get this project done,'" said Martorano.

Raisor too, was concerned about his community, more specifically, the growing Hamburg area east of downtown Lexington where he and his family live.

Hamburg had just about everything a neighborhood needs — grocery stores and gas stations, restaurants and retail stores, banks and churches. What it lacked, Raisor believed, was a unifying force, a central gathering place.

"I had lived out in Hamburg about eight years, and I kept hearing about a Y coming to this side of town," he said. "I thought, 'We need something like that to build up the sense of community.'"

He called Martorano. "I told him 'I want to find out how I can become the Hamburg Y's first member. How can I help get this out of the ground?'" Martorano admired Raisor's moxie and asked him to serve on the YMCA association board and later, as the Hamburg project was revived, to chair its managing board.

Come this fall, when the 62,000-square-foot Hamburg Place YMCA opens at 2681 Old Rosebud Road a few blocks off Sir Barton Way, Raisor and Bassett will see their wishes for Lexington's fastest-growing area come true. "The Hamburg Y is really going to unite the community and be a focal point," said Raisor.

A longstanding Lexington institution

The YMCA has been in the business of building and improving the Lexington community since 1853, 44 years before horseman John Madden established his Hamburg Place Farm and turned out champion Thor-



UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY PHOTO ARCHIVE

A Lexington YMCA exercise class, circa 1908

oughbreds on the land where the Hamburg Place Y is being built.

The YMCA of those days was far different from those of today. Like the original YMCAs founded in England, early YMCAs in the United States were designed to help young men who had moved to the city from rural areas lead purposeful, healthful lives. The organization lived up to its acronym. Those it served were young, Christian, and men.

Lexington had a reputation for progressiveness, and that was further evidenced when it established its YMCA system just two years after the first YMCA in the United States opened in Boston in 1851.

"The Lexington Y system is one of the earliest in the country, the 18th established in North America," said David Elsen, executive director of Lexington's High Street YMCA.

The organization first held its meetings at First Presbyterian Church, then located at Second and Broadway. It would move to several buildings throughout downtown before the first purpose-built YMCA was constructed in 1904 at Market and Church streets. That building is now home to LexArts.

More than a half-century later a larger, more modern YMCA, with an indoor pool, a gymnasium, exercise facilities and offices would be built, in stages over five years, on High Street near Rose Street.

Two new YMCAs open in one year

For the next four decades the High Street YMCA was the heart of Lexington's Y system. Other branches would come and go — for a time, there was a Y on Maryland Avenue and another next to the Lexington Ice Center near Richmond and Mount Tabor roads —



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An early YMCA stood on Church Street in downtown Lexington.

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YMCA OF CENTRAL KENTUCKY

but, for the most part, the High Street YMCA was the centerpiece of the system.

Then, in 2000, Lexington's Y system took a giant leap and opened two new YMCA branches, one in the budding Beaumont neighborhood and the other on the north side of downtown, adjacent to the Lexmark corporate campus.

Carol Martin "Bill" Gatton, for whom the Beaumont Y would later be renamed, donated the land for the Beaumont location. (He also donated the land for Hamburg.) As at Hamburg, a YMCA was seen as a vital tool for knitting together a new and growing neighborhood.

And the YMCA board supported the project, but its members also believed the Y would not be fulfilling its mission if it opened a Y on Lexington's south side without also opening one on its underserved and less affluent north side. Lexmark donated the land for the North Lexington branch.

In time each of Lexington's three Ys has developed its own persona. Molly Caldwell, president of the Kentucky Parks Foundation and chair of the North Lexington Y's managing board, says



Left, David Martorano, president and CEO, and Bryan Raiser, chairman of the Hamburg Y's managing board

Y FACTS

- In Lexington the YMCA of Central Kentucky serves 68,000 people, including its members and program participants. Nationwide there are more than 2,700 YMCAs serving some 22 million Americans. Worldwide the Y serves 45 million people in 119 countries.

- Membership fees provide 60 percent of the monies needed for the day-to-day operation the YMCA of Central Kentucky. The remainder comes from programming (28 percent) and contributions and grants (12 percent).

- James Naismith invented basketball during a YMCA training school in Springfield, Mass., in 1891. His boss had challenged Naismith, a physical education teacher, to come up with an indoor, wintertime sport. Naismith tacked peach baskets to a second-floor running track, posted a few rules, and basketball was born.

- A YMCA instructor also invented volleyball in 1895 at a Y in Holyoke, Mass. It was designed as a game for businessmen who might not be fit enough to play basketball.

- In Lexington in the early 1900s, the YMCA's men's basketball team had a 7-5 record against the University of Kentucky men's team.

- The YMCA claims many firsts, including the first indoor pool (Brooklyn, 1885); first indoor filtered pool (Kansas City, 1910); first group swim lesson (Detroit, 1907); and the first English as a Second Language class (Cincinnati, 1956).

- Events and organizations launched at Ys include Father's Day (1910, Spokane), the Boy Scouts of America, the Camp Fire Girls, the Gideons and Toastmasters, and the Negro National Baseball League.

Sources: YMCA in America, 1851-2001: A History of Accomplishment Over 150 Years; YMCA.net and David Elsen, YMCA of Central Kentucky



A ribbon cutting marked the completed expansion of the North Lexington YMCA, which has enabled more room for exercise equipment and additional activities.

neighborhoods shape their Ys. “Each one is a reflection of the surrounding area,” she said. “At North, for example, you have a growing, diverse population and the staff and volunteers there work to have an environment of inclusion.”

\$36.7 million in capital projects

The \$20 million cost of the Hamburg Y is about half of what is being invested in building the YMCA of Central Kentucky system, which also includes Y operations in Jessamine and Scott counties and management of facilities in Frankfort. “We’re about halfway through \$36.7 million in capital projects,” said Martorano.

In early January, \$3 million in renovations and expansions were unveiled at the North Lexington YMCA, including a striking glass-fronted wellness center, a new exercise room, renovated lobby, and improved locker rooms. Renovations and improvements are also under way at the Beaumont YMCA.

And the often-renovated High Street Y is now on the drawing board. Discussions with architects have begun on what Martorano describes as “a new Y at the existing High Street location.”

Hamburg represents a new era

In the meantime, the Hamburg branch is a Y of the new era. Although it is about the same size as the Beaumont location, the Y’s busiest branch, because of its open design Hamburg will feel larger. A bow-shaped wall of glass will front the building, bringing light into the lobby and into the wellness center above it, where members running on treadmills can watch activity along Sir Barton Way as they exercise. “It won’t be like exercising in a box,” said Martorano. Interior spaces open to one another, making it easy to stand

The Hamburg Y will have several features that are new to the YMCA of Central Kentucky.

A SPRAY GROUND PLAYGROUND

Instead of an outdoor pool, the Y will have a spray ground, where geysers, fountains, and other water features shoot up from the earth, creating a wet and cool playground for children. The fenced-in spray ground will have lounge chairs around its perimeter so parents can relax and watch their children. A spray ground has several advantages over a pool — for one, it can be used an average 120 days a year versus about 90 for an outdoor pool in this region.

It also doesn’t require as much prep time and maintenance as a pool does. “If the temperatures were warm enough on a March day, for example, we could turn it on,” said David Martorano, president and CEO of the YMCA of Central Kentucky. The spray ground stretches along the back of the Y, adjacent to the 4.4-acre tract that the Y bought in December for sports and camps programming and to buffer it from the Tuscany neighborhood.

HEALTHY EATS AND DRINKS

In a corner of the big, airy lobby, The Press Juice and Health Bar, a local business, will offer cold-pressed juices, smoothies, salads, gluten-free baked goods and soft-serve yogurts, elixir waters, and coffee. The addition means no snack machines, which are the only food option at existing Ys. Tables, chairs, and other seating, coupled with the food, will enhance the lobby, which is always the gathering place at YMCAs, Martorano said. “The Y is a big gathering place and a lot of that social interaction happens in the lobby.”

The healthy foods bar and the spray ground are ideas that might be instituted at other Ys in the system, Martorano said.

ONE GIANT POOL; THREE PERSONALITIES

Not building an outdoor pool has allowed the Hamburg Y to have a more elaborate and versatile indoor pool. The design is interesting — one body of water, divvied into three sections. On one side, there is a traditional, rectangular lap pool. A narrow viaduct links the lap pool to the play pool and its slides, waterfalls, geysers, and other features. The viaduct is spanned by a bridge, a replica of one at the Hamburg Place Thoroughbred cemetery. A small, square pool area for swim lessons and other aquatics classes is linked to one corner of the play pool. “So, five to six things can be happening at the pool, all at one time,” said Martorano. The pool complex will also have a large whirlpool and sauna and steam rooms.

LOCKER ROOMS DESIGNED FOR FAMILIES

Because families with children are, as Martorano says, “the Y’s sweet spot,” the new Y incorporates a design for family locker rooms that affords more privacy. Eight changing rooms and six family shower rooms flank a central hallway. Each of the shower rooms basically looks like a bathroom at home with a shower, a sink, a toilet, hooks for towels, benches, and a door. It’s another way for the Y to ensure a safe, family-friendly environment, Martorano said.

in one spot and see into the pool, the gym, the childcare area, and the lobby at the same time.

Hamburg will have a number of features new to the Y system, (see p. 78) and it was also built with the future in mind. "We want the space to be flexible to the changing needs of the marketplace," said Martorano. So, for example, should the youth development wing or health and wellness center become overtaxed, the building design allows a wall to be bumped out, and another youth development room or additional wellness center could be added adjacent to the existing one. At the same time, the three-lane running track that circles above the gym could be extended. Keeneland earned naming rights to the track through

its support of the Hamburg Y.

The Y also plans to compete for those who are looking for more than the cardiovascular workouts, strength training, and group exercise classes the Y has become known for. It will offer functional training, done one on one or in small groups, using old-school equipment such as bags, ropes, and kettle bells.

"This isn't going to be your daddy's Y," Martorano said.

More than a gym

Nice, new facilities are important to the Y's success, but as its leaders point out, the Y is much more than a place to work out. Its three-pronged mission — youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility — gives it a lot of ways to make an impact.

For example, the YMCA of Central Kentucky is among several hundred across the country to offer a diabetes prevention program developed by the national YMCA.

Across the nation YMCAs are known for summer camps and swim lessons, and the Central Kentucky Y is no different. This summer, hundreds of school children will receive vouchers for free swim lessons at the Y after they participate in Central Kentucky Swims, which teaches children how to save themselves and others from drowning.

The Y also has delved

into programs in support of education. This summer, for the third year, it will finance a program aimed at preventing children from losing ground in their studies over the summer.

Caldwell has seen the difference that the Y's after-school programs can make for working parents, many of whom can't afford childcare. "No one is turned away if they don't have the ability to pay," she said. Parents and teachers consistently say they see "grades and attitudes of these children improving consistently," Caldwell said.

Many of the programs the Y has initiated have become local institutions. Among them is Black Achievers, a mentoring program for youth of color that was founded 31 years ago. Lynsey Crumbie is the current youth president of the organization. Involved in Black Achievers since she was in seventh grade, Crumbie said getting to know her mentors and learn about their jobs helped her decide to pursue a career in public health when she heads to the University of Louisville this fall.

Getting and giving back

In his few years as a YMCA volunteer, Risor has been amazed by all the organization does — the more than \$1 million in financial assistance it provides to those who can't afford its programs, for example.

It makes him glad he called Martorano and got on board with not just the Hamburg project but with the many aspects of the YMCA of Central Kentucky.

"I didn't realize the magnitude and the breadth of activities it offers, and its ability to help people from a financial standpoint. It really shows that we care about people in the community and we want everyone to participate." **KM**



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