

Refurbished Whiting Community Center becomes new home for Y



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WHITING | It's not a typical YMCA - and gymgoers wanting to enter a Gatsby-style-era building before sweating off pounds will have the chance when the former Whiting Community Center reopens April 6.

City of Whiting and YMCA officials held a ribbon cutting ceremony at the building Monday afternoon.

The building at 1938 Clark St. that John D. Rockefeller gave to Whiting in November 1923 has a new lease on life after an estimated \$3.2 million in capital funds from the city of Whiting to bankroll extensive renovations to its basement and first floor, according to Mayor Joseph Stahura.

The YMCA is currently leasing the building for \$1 per year. It is also taking over its operating expenses, saving the city more than \$500,000 per year, Stahura said.

With efforts to restore parts of the building taking well more than a year, lead architect Tom Vavrek said it was important to try to preserve as much of its character as the original builder designed, including re-tiling first level floors close to its original pattern and restoring the antique-style wooden moulding on its walls.

"You kind of create some empathy with that person," he said. "This is their legacy, so you try to respect that."

The workout room has now shifted from a 400-square-room on the second floor to an expansive space in the basement replacing the former bowling alley, where gymgoers will be surrounded by the building's original Corinthian columns.

"Once it closed, I put on 20 pounds," said Esmeralda Cano, 61 of Whiting. "Now I need to work it off."

The former upstairs workout room will instead be used for yoga and maybe some tai chi, said Ed Salata, chief Operating Officer of Crossroads YMCA, that also operates branches in Hammond, Crown Point and Griffith.

With Whiting still retaining ownership but unwilling to continue bankrolling the cost of day-to-day operating expenses, Salata said the organization was confident it would attract enough memberships to make it financially sustainable.

"There's always that predicament and concern," he said. "With people coming in, we don't think that's going to be an issue."

The Y was in the best position to preserve its role in the community, he said.

"It's a lot of history," Salata said. "It's going to be a building of a practical nature."



Whiting YMCA Ribbon Cutting a Celebration of a Community Connecting

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Residents of Whiting, IN joined Mayor Joseph M. Stahura and YMCA executives for the ceremonial ribbon cutting of the new Whiting YMCA located at 1938 Clark St.

The facility, which boasts state-of-the-art workout equipment juxtaposed inside the beautiful, early-20th century former Whiting Community Center in the heart of the city is the result of a lot of hard work and excellent teamwork between the YMCA and the City of Whiting itself.



“Working with the City of Whiting has been an absolute joy,” Crossroads YMCA CEO, Phil Mallers, said. “I have never worked next to better people than who work for this city. We have changed things a hundred times on them and it’s no problem, they’ll do it.”

The ribbon cutting was a culmination of over a year’s worth of work off an idea sprung by former Clerk Treasurer, Mark Adam.

“(Adam) was actually the person who came up with the idea contact the Y,” Mayor Stahura said.

From that idea, Stahura noted, Vavrek Architecture and Berglund Construction ran with the ball and turned the idea into a beautiful reality.

“Vavrek laid it out, they designed this,” Stahura added. “And Berglund Construction served as the Construction Managers, watching over this project and making sure it all comes together.”



The end result is a center that the City of Whiting can be proud of. In addition to the workout equipment, the center also features a swimming pool, basketball court, aerobics area, and child-care center; all in a centralized location that residents of Whiting can easily access and enjoy.

And while there certainly seems like there is something for everyone at the new Whiting YMCA, the center wants to take the community involvement aspect to the next level by getting actively involved in getting input from local residents to make sure that the Whiting YMCA has what the city's residents most want.

"Every community is different, and what programs they most want to see at their YMCA is different," new Program Director, Hunter McKee, who got his start in the YMCA as a Lifeguard, told Ideas In Motion Media. "We have sent out surveys to the Whiting residents to see what programs they really want at their Y."

"That is what is so special about the Y," McKee added. "It really takes the time to find out what the community wants from it."

This community connection and dedication to providing a facility that is truly Whiting's own Y, McKee says, is what he hopes Whiting residents will come to love from the new Whiting YMCA.

And Mayor Stahura could not agree more that a YMCA is not just a new workout facility, but a long-term, positive addition to the fabric of Whiting.



"This



facility is going to serve our community for a lot of years to come," Stahura concluded before cutting the ribbon on the Whiting YMCA.

As previously noted, the new facility will open on April 6, and Whiting residents are encouraged to stop in on that day and find out what the new Whiting YMCA has to offer them.

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