

## YMCA eyes new pool for swim lessons

By Mark Langlois  
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DANBURY — Building a new pool at the YMCA's Greenknoll facility may seem a bit like bringing coals to Newcastle, but nearly every day the Y's pools in Danbury and Brookfield are crowded.

"The prime times are so much in demand," said Chris Abbott, branch director at the Boughton Street YMCA. The prime times are early morning, afternoons and nights. "Another pool would help the whole organization."

Abbott said the new pool proposed for the Greenknoll campus on Huckleberry Hill Road in Brookfield will create another chance for people to learn to swim.

"Drowning is the No. 2 cause of death for children under 12," Abbott said. "It's scary."

The YMCA runs swim classes after school during the week and all day Saturday. During the school day, the Y runs swim classes for preschool children.

In the summer, the Y opens two seasonal pools at the Greenknoll camp, and those pools are about 50 years old. The plan is to replace the two old pools with a new year-round pool that will be 50 meters long and enclosed in glass.

"The overriding reason is the nationwide fight against obesity and (for) safety," said Kevin Kelleher, president of Cendant Mobility, who is heading the YMCA's fundraising drive for the new pool.

He said teaching children to swim is one of the major goals for the new pool, but it seems like people may not have heard that message.

"We have a lake. People are boating. We have a critical mission to teach children how to swim when they're very young," Kelleher said.

Kelleher said when the YMCA uncovered its camp pools this spring, one was completely empty, because water leaked out through the cracks. The second is also leaking.

"We already have 262 children signed up for camp. They learn not only how to dive. They learn how to swim," Kelleher said. "It's a huge need."

After the pool project was announced in March, a flurry of donations came in, Kelleher said. The Regional Y has \$1.4 million of the \$2.9 million required, but needs another \$500,000 to start construction.

The new, state-of-the-art aquatic center will have an Olympic-size pool, 50 meters long. Plans call for it to be glass-enclosed during cold weather. During the summer, the walls would be removed and the roof retracted to give the feel of outdoor swimming.

"Everyone is always fighting for pool time," said New Milford resident and swimmer Bill Baker. Some days when he shows up at the Y in Brookfield in the afternoon, half the pool is closed for an aerobics class or the whole pool is closed for use by a swim team.

"Another pool would be great. I'm all for it," Baker said. He typically swims in the morning, and most days he and a second person share a lane. He said on a busy day, three or more people share a lane.

The Greenknoll YMCA facility has an indoor pool, which will not be affected. But the new facility will replace pools at the summer day camp that date to the 1950s. The facility will also have locker rooms, a concession stand and viewing area.

The Boughton Street Y facility has been in the news for more than a year, since officials announced plans to close it because it was losing members and money.

But community outcry saved the facility, built in 1967, and the Y received a \$500,000 state grant to begin renovating the building.

The renovation work is now out to bid, said Chris Abbott, Y branch manager, and the goal is to finish the renovations by September.

The downtown Danbury facility will get a new gymnasium floor, new workout equipment, a larger workout room, a new roof and improved air conditioning. The work is scheduled to cost roughly \$700,000.

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Aaron Flaum  
Natalie Tikhomirova, 8, swims the backstroke during a class at the Danbury YMCA on Thursday.