

10/13/2006

'Y' embarks on ambitious pool project

By: Scott Benjamin

"We were able to work out the arrangements in late summer in very fast time," George Walker of Brookfield, the chairman of the YMCA's Board of Directors, said after the formal groundbreaking Saturday at the day camp behind the Greenknoll branch on Huckleberry Hill Road.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has backed a \$2.1 million loan to complete the first phase of the project, and Union Savings Bank, NewMil Bank, Newtown Savings Bank and the Savings Bank of Danbury also are providing assistance.

Greg Dembowski of Brookfield, the capital campaign director, said that the loan assistance would enable the YMCA to proceed with the project and open the new 50-meter Olympic-length pool June 1, 2007, as had been scheduled.

"We broke ground last month, and if it is a mild winter there will be work going on almost continuously over the coming months," he said.

Kevin Kelleher of Brookfield, the chairman of the capital campaign, said during Saturday's ceremony that the YMCA has collected \$850,000 in pledges since holding a news conference on its campaign in April.

Mr. Walker said the amount of pledges to date has "been reasonable, but we're going to have to do better."

He said that construction of the second phase of the project, which would include enclosing the pool for winter use and the construction of an attached building with locker rooms and an observation gallery, would depend on future fund-raising efforts.

The Regional YMCA announced in April that the improvements to the Greenknoll facilities would probably cost about \$2.9 million.

"The community needs to realize that we need support," Mr. Walker added regarding the continued efforts to attract sponsors for the capital campaign, which also includes about \$700,000 in renovations to the Boughton Street facility in Danbury.

The pool would replace swimming facilities that are about 50 years old and have become outdated for the day camp, which each summer attracts many area youngsters. It would provide more swimming space than the existing pools combined.

Gary Kozak, the president and chief executive officer of the Regional YMCA, stated in a news release that ever since the organization began operation at the camp 20 years ago \$840,000 in scholarships have been awarded to families in need.

Robert Steers, an area specialist with the USDA office in Windsor, said that the aquatic center "will create over 45 new jobs and save over 200 jobs in this area."

Brookfield First Selectman Jerry Murphy has said that there has been a growing interest in swimming in the area in recent years, noting that, for example, the Brookfield High School (BHS) boys swim team has won several state and conference titles.

The BHS boys and girls swim teams don't have their own pool and for years, through the help of the Regional YMCA, have practiced in the 25 yard pool at the Greenknoll branch.

Danbury Mayor Mark Boughton, who was a counselor at the camp some years ago, state Sen. David Capiello (R-Danbury) and state Rep. David Scribner (R-Brookfield) attended last week's ceremony.

Mr. Kelleher, who is the president of Cartus, formerly known as Cendant Mobility, in Danbury, said that he and other officials of the Regional YMCA would be most interested in meeting with any prospective sponsors for the capital campaign.