

YMCA to pool funds Plans include \$2.9M swimming facility

By Mark Langlois THE NEWS-TIMES

The new, state-of-the-art aquatic center will have an Olympic-sized pool – 50 meters long.

Plans call for it to be glass-enclosed during cold weather. During the summer, the walls can be removed and the roof retracted to give the feel of outdoor swimming.

"We saw one at the Orange/Milford YMCA in January. People were standing around in shorts looking out through the walls at snow banks. It was very comfortable," said Greg Dembowski, capital campaign director for the Regional YMCA of Greater Danbury and Eastern Putnam County.

The regional YMCA plans to build the Brookfield aquatic center with proceeds from a \$4 million fundraising drive announced Monday. Some money will also go for better equipment and facilities at the Boughton Street Y in Danbury.

The regional Y has already raised \$1.4 million, said Kevin Kelleher, the capital campaign chairman, who has been quietly working on the project for months.

"You hear \$1.4 million? That's a great start, but we need another \$500,000 just to break ground at Greenknoll Camp," said Kelleher, president and CEO of Cendant Mobility in Danbury, a corporate relocation company.

The Boughton Street 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 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, and the goal is to start and finish it in 2007.

In addition to the state grant, the Y has received \$100,000 from Praxair Inc. of Danbury and 30 individual contributions for the Boughton Street project.

The bigger price tag is for the aquatic center, which is estimated to cost \$2.9 million. The would be built on the grounds of the Greenknoll Camp in Brookfield, not far from the current Greenknoll YMCA building.

The current 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.

Like others in the swim community, Brian Reiff, Brookfield High School's swimming and diving coach, welcomed news of the new aquatic center.

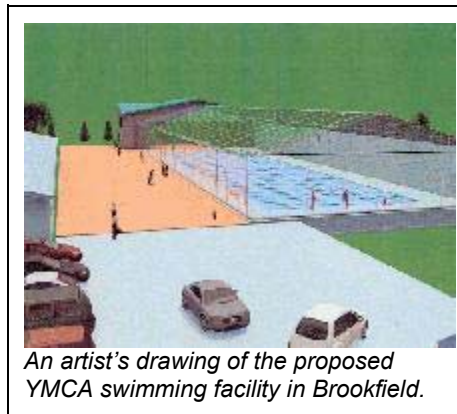
Since there is no pool at Brookfield High, the Bobcats' swim teams have led a rather nomadic existence. The boys team practices at the YMCA, but only has one home meet per season.

"Any effort that puts a pool in our town would be a dream for me as a coach," "The numbers dictate that the town is crying out for it, and with the Y getting behind this thing, I think it's awesome."

Among those at Monday's announcement of the fundraising drive was Dr. John Murphy, chairman of the board of directors at Danbury Hospital.

He hopes the upgraded Danbury Y and the new swim facility in Brookfield will help the YMCA reduce obesity, which is becoming a national epidemic among children and adults. He said promoting physical activity is the first step in fighting obesity.

"It's a staggering national problem," Murphy said. "Somewhere between 9 and 9.5 percent of health care costs are attributable to obesity."



An artist's drawing of the proposed YMCA swimming facility in Brookfield.

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