

The Y

It does more than tone bodies

By Debbie Wallis Landau
special writer

Are you one of the thousands of people who wish to start a fitness program, but don't know where to begin?

Whatever your age, physical condition or personal questions, the staff of the Farmington YMCA has addressed needs like yours before. One of the organization's primary goals is to make you feel confident and comfortable with the type and level of activity you choose.

"We want to treat our participants as the multi-dimensional individuals they are," says Greg Voss, the YMCA's Senior Physical Director. "I think more and more what we're going to see in the 1990s is not just training of a person's body, but fitness as a way to enhance physical and mental well-being and to improve self-concept."

Presenting a non-threatening environment and placing participants in the appropriate programs, he believes, will encourage success.

One of the ways the YMCA accomplishes this is to require an annual Fitness Evaluation of each member-participant. Screenings are regularly conducted at seven or eight week intervals, take only 25 or 30 minutes and provide the staff with important medical fitness information.

SAYS MARY Fletcher, the Y's physical enhancement director, "Our screenings take blood pressure and cholesterol readings. We show participants how to find a pulse and guide them to what their training and resting heart rates should be with regard to exercise."

Body composition and a body fat analysis using calipers on different locations of the body is also done. "No one should get scared away by the screening," reassures Fletcher, "because it's all done to make sure someone enrolls in a program they can do and feel good doing."

Greg Voss concurs. "If I meet a 48-year-old person who is, say, 50 pounds overweight, I want to encourage him or her that there's a program that's manageable. I want to boost that person's morale."

An enormous part of the encouragement can come from the instructors themselves, says Fletcher, who supervises all aerobics and specialty training.

"It's very common around here for an instructor to call a new participant in the beginning of their program. And I would sincerely hope that a student would feel free to call their teacher if something was disappointing about a class."

This fall the YMCA hosted its eighth annual Fitness Leaders Workshop to award instructors their national fitness certification. The instructors attended a half-day of discussions on such topics as exercise physiology, nutrition, safety methods, liability, stretching and class components. They also participated in four hours of varying hands-on fitness activities.

The next day, a Sunday Spectacular offered additional mini workshops in such specialty areas as weight training, water fitness, judo, dance choreography, and a session called "Creative Options."

"That introduced instructors to ways of stimulating different movements to vary class routines," explains Fletcher. "You can use jump ropes and dya-bands, for example, to keep participants moving without having to use a lot of expensive equipment."

IN HER OWN teaching, Fletcher likes to conduct "Circuit Days" where routines may include such varying moves as low-beam balance beam, basketball and ski jump moves. She said students don't always have an appreciation of the dynamics of preparing a class.

"Putting movements to music is harder than it looks," she says. "If your class flows smoothly and your instructor is easy to follow, she or he must certainly put a lot of effort into developing the routine for you."

She adds that any good aerobic workout ideally contains six stages:

- warm-up to get blood circulating
- stretching and limbering movements
- aerobics
- cool down
- strengthening and endurance movements
- rhythmic relaxation.

"One of the very positive things about the training instructors receive here is that we closely follow national guidelines. On the local and national levels, special medical advisory boards work closely with our staffs to develop and follow safe, beneficial programs. Recently, a young woman who relocated from the Seattle area called me and identified her training," Fletcher said.

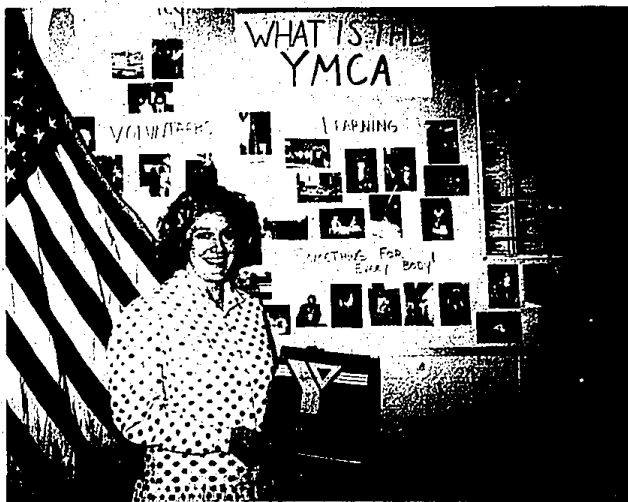
"I knew exactly what she had studied and that she could probably adapt to this environment well as a teacher. All our branches have the liberty to interpret moves differently but the uniformity of the guidelines is helpful."

TODAY the international YMCA is a household word across the globe, signifying diversified athletic, service and training programs for youths and adults of both sexes, all races and religions. It wasn't always the case.

The Young Men's Christian Association actually began in London in 1844, when George Williams, a young dry goods clerk, wanted to develop a program to improve the spiritual lives of young men and help them resist the temptations of the big cities in the Industrial Age. He was later knighted by Queen Victoria for his service to youth.

Emulating Williams' example, Thomas Valentine Sullivan, a retired Bostonian sea captain and lay minister, founded the first United States YMCA in Boston in 1851. Detroit soon followed in 1852 with its first branch in a building on the south side of Jefferson between Woodward and Gratiot.

Now there are at least 2,500 branches of the YMCA in 92 countries. Unlike those earlier YMCA branches which did not focus so much on developing the body as the mind, today's branches offer programs in swimming, racquetball, summer camp, Indian Guides, karate, water fitness, aerobics, hatha yoga and therapeutic massage.



KERRY BOWMAN

Mary Fletcher, Farmington area YMCA's director of physical enhancement, talks about the

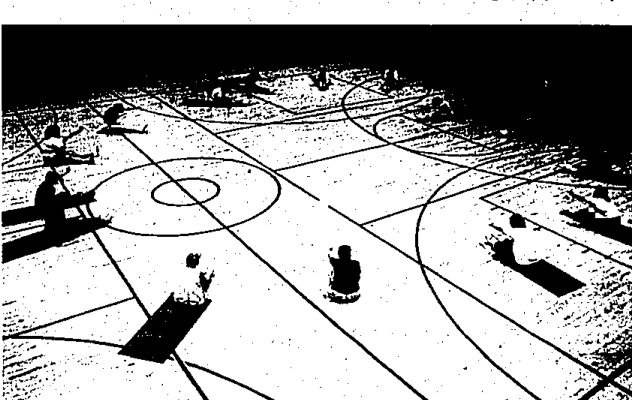
organization's goals, its philosophy, the multi-generational and special populations it serves.

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generational in its approach, with special fitness and water exercise programs for older, active adults. Both are well-attended.

Other special populations the YMCA serves are those who might be working with physical therapists

THE FARMINGTON Y is multi-



KERRY BOWMAN

At just about any time of the day or evening the Farmington Y's gym will be filled with a class, tailor-made for the participants.

are in some form of rehabilitation program. YMCA staff often work in tandem with physical therapists to help supervise use of the equipment.

Wellness Center staff members also work with a group of persons with closed head injuries, and the YMCA helps subsidize the membership of residents of a local group home.

The fall 1990 activities brochure distributed by the Farmington Area Branch has a headline: "Your Family Would Fit Right In." The words aren't meant to be corny, but simply reflect that the YMCA does try to fill the needs of whoever walks in its doors.

Anthony Ripley, editor of "Discovery" YMCA, wrote in an introduction to Andrea Hindling's "Proud Heritage: A History in Pictures of the YMCA in the United States." "Part of the reason the Y has lasted for so many years is that it never really narrowed its focus to serve a limited group. Its mission remains: to mold people who care about each other, who firmly believe everyone is worthy of respect."

Mary Fletcher and Greg Voss share that philosophy, and believe it is characteristic of their staff, too.

"We want our instructors to be well-trained. But it's equally important that they be good people, too. That can be more valuable than being 'multi-degreed,'" Voss said. Says Fletcher, "If I had to sum up a goal we try to follow, it's that we hope to encourage others to be the best they can be."

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