

The Y's Role in Economic Development

I recently attended the town hall meeting with Senator Dahms and Representative Swedzinski and one of the discussions delved into our local workforce and attracting qualified staff to fill the many open positions in Southwest Minnesota. During this conversation the YMCA was referenced as an economic development asset that was conceived to add to the quality of life for existing residents and help attract and retain the workforce of tomorrow. The reality is that we live in a community full of amenities and facilities like a quality school system, a 4 year college, healthcare centers, the Red Baron Arena, state / county / city parks and a regional trail system which are all part of what attracts and retains our workforce.

In the case of the YMCA, hundreds of individuals and businesses rallied to provide \$5 million dollars which was generously matched by a joint effort of the Schwan's Corporate Giving Foundation and the Schwan's Food Company. Since the grand opening in July of 2003, the Y has maintained 5,000+ members with well over 300,000 visits per year. While it is easy to label the Y as a fitness club this would dismiss the ongoing community support and greater impact the Y provides as a non-profit organization.

First the foremost, the community continues to support the Y Partners Campaign which provides dollars to sponsor YMCA use for the under-served in our community. Providing equity in the areas of health and access benefits the base of our workforce, assists in employee retention, improves overall community health, and supports the financial feasibility of the Y through the addition of members who are paying the balance of fees not covered by the sponsorship.

In turn, the Y provides a community hub for residents to not only improve their social, mental and physical health but vote, give blood, hold meetings, host graduations, family reunions, and birthday parties. The Y provides a venue for community-wide events like Healthy Kids Day, Bike Safety Day, Campus / Community Connect, Halloween at the Y, Kindness Retreats, an Easter egg hunt, Duathlon, Gobble Wobble and so much more.

The Y also partners with a large variety of community organizations for programs and functions. SMSU, private and public schools, scouting programs, Special Olympics, Avera Medical Wellness, the United Way, United Community Action, Healthy56258, Sunrise Rotary, City of Marshall, Marshall Area Farmers Market, Schwan's, religious organizations, SW Health and Human Services, Marshall Chamber of Commerce, Convention and Visitors Bureau, Adult Community Center, Heritage Pointe, Boulder Creek and many more.

As the Y enters our Y Partners Campaign season consider supporting your Y through a donation or becoming one of the 60+ campaigners who advocate for the Y. This support comes back to the community many times over.