

# YMCA



## BUILDING STRONG COMMUNITIES FOR THE LONG TERM

by Amy McNeil

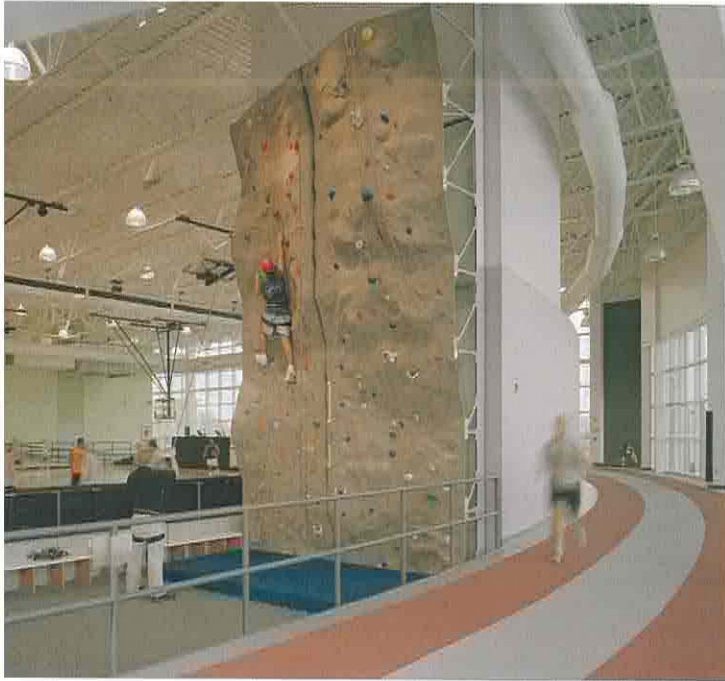
*Above: Recycled steel was used in the building structure of the East Palo Alto Family YMCA.*

THE YMCA'S MOTTO IS "BUILDING strong kids, strong families, and strong communities." The organization has recently taken a longer-term focus on the environmental effects of its buildings. Across the nation, YMCA organizations are forging new paths by embracing green building.

Grand Rapids, MI has the first Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified YMCA in the US, as a result of community

members donating a lead gift of \$5 million to build a new YMCA. "Once we learned from our donor about building supporting the environment, we committed the project to LEED certification," says Donald McCarthy, chief operating officer, YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids.

The Grand Rapids YMCA became LEED certified only weeks before a second in Atlanta's Vickery district. Its focus of sustainable development was



*Left: The open environment and window make the facility feel much larger than its 160,000 square feet.*

*Right: Youth learn yoga on gymnasium wood floors that come from sustainably managed forests certified by the Forest Stew.*

*Facing page: Large windows in the wellness center give members a nice view of the outside while working out. The windows provide plenty of natural light and prevent unwanted heat/cool air from coming into the building.*

also a direct result of donors' efforts. Though it was built at approximately the same time, the Atlanta YMCA evolved separately from the Grand Rapids project. At this point, however, some YMCA organizations began to contact each other about green building and design. By the time Grand Rapids finished their certification, plans for a LEED-certified East Palo Alto YMCA were well underway. "We were able to have a significant connection and share knowledge with each other about our projects," says McCarthy. The East Palo Alto project had begun a few years earlier, according to David Fisch, vice president of property, YMCA of the Mid-Peninsula. "We began fundraising in 2000 and wanted to be environmentally conscious with our building. We educated ourselves, our board, and our community members. Without their push, it would not have been accomplished," Fisch says.



As LEED certification was at the forefront for these associations, George Stazin identified the need for a workshop on green building for the 2007 YMCA National Conference. Stazin is the director of facility consulting for the YMCA of the USA. "The interest in being environmentally conscious typifies the mood of the country. Even though LEED certification is fairly new to the YMCA organization, it gave us the impetus to put a workshop together answering questions about the work involved in certification," says Stazin. His workshop, "Why Go Green?", discussed why a YMCA might consider green building and the issues involved with certification. Two main issues it addressed were the idea of environmental responsibility with designing environmentally friendly structures and the strong appeal from potential donors for LEED-certified projects. Stazin included the three

LEED-certified YMCAs in the seminar. Fisch and McCarthy presented overviews of their fundraising, educational, building, and certification processes, and all three men, including Ed Munster, executive vice president/chief operating officer, YMCA of Metro Atlanta, answered audience questions.

One common concern raised was the extra cost involved in green building, especially for a philanthropic organization relying on donations to fund its work. It cost both Atlanta and East Palo Alto about 2–3 percent more for green building, but all of the YMCAs cited strong donor appeal for the environmentally conscious projects.

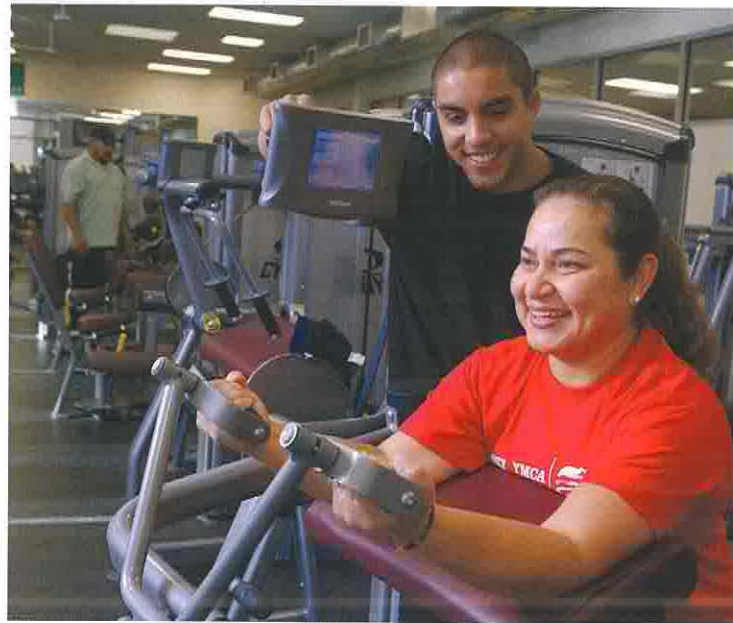
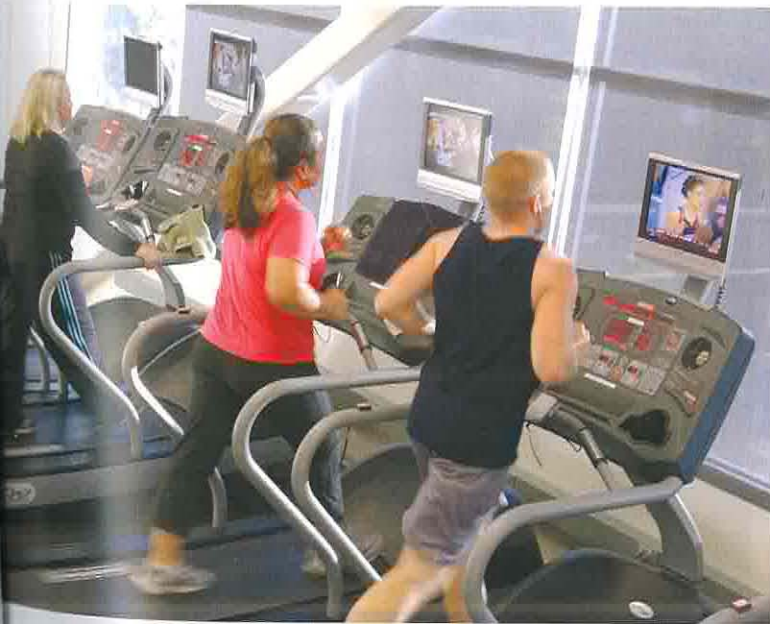
“Once we learned from our donor about building that supports the environment, we’ve also found the general opinion is that a greater initial cost is OK if a building performs better for users and if there’s a payback from energy savings, both of which green buildings usually accomplish,” explains Stazin.

“Our role,” Stazin continues, “is to ensure that a YMCA in pursuit of LEED certification pursues what’s most compatible for users. Our office translates how green building affects designs so as to provide the optimal benefit for members.” McCarthy shared aspects of the Grand Rapids YMCA that improved the experience for its

users, including 92 percent penetration from natural light and materials chosen for low levels of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) to improve air quality. The East Palo Alto YMCA cited similar benefits of better lighting, enhanced HVAC systems, low-VOC adhesives, paints, and glues, and the use of recycled materials purchased locally.

Stretching beyond their own members, each of the YMCA representatives also stressed green building benefits for local communities. In Grand Rapids, use of waterless urinals should save an average of 40,000 gallons of water per urinal per year. In Georgia, the use of grey water systems, which recycle pool

“THE YMCA IS A COMMUNITY-ORIENTED ORGANIZATION MEANT TO HELP PEOPLE LEAD HEALTHIER LIVES. GREEN BUILDING IS MORE THAN A BONUS—IT FITS OUR WORLDVIEW THAT THIS IS THE RIGHT THING TO DO.” *David Fisch, Vice President of Property, YMCA of the Mid-Peninsula*



and shower water for irrigation and toilets, save hundreds of thousands of gallons of water each year. In California, the optimized HVAC system saves at least \$36,000 on gas and electricity each year.

Most importantly, though, are the long-term benefits that these YMCAs offer their communities. Grand Rapids and Atlanta have committed to creating LEED-certified buildings for all new YMCA construction, and Atlanta will also have the first retrofit certification in March. Fisch attributes green building efforts to the YMCA's overarching philosophy: "The YMCA is a community-oriented organization meant to help people lead healthier lives. Green building is more than a bonus—it fits our worldview that this is the right thing to do."

Stazin has seen growing interest in green building by YMCAs across the country. For next year's conference he will expand his workshop to include discoveries from this past year's projects. In the meantime, he is enthusiastic about the progress that he's seen and the ongoing cooperation of YMCAs across the United States. He simply states, "It's important to be environmentally responsible. Green buildings are here to stay." **CBQ**



Left: Donald E. McCarthy, chief operating officer, YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids.



Right: Dave Fisch, vice president of property for the YMCA of the Mid-Peninsula.

**green sports**

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