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Local YMCA Building Partnerships To Boost Services, Programs

By SHANNON MORTLAND, smortland@crain.com

The Greater Cleveland YMCA is pursuing collaborative projects that would enable the nonprofit to grow its traditional services and to create new programs.

While it is working with local cities to open new YMCA branches, the organization also is engaged with local colleges and government entities to address health disparities in the region's population, said Glenn Haley, president and CEO of the Greater Cleveland YMCA.

"This is part of our strategic priorities, to find ways to partner with other entities in the community to bring services closer to where people live," Mr. Haley said.

One of the largest such collaborations is supported by a five-year, \$2 million grant the YMCA recently received from the federal Centers for Disease Control & Prevention to address diabetes and heart disease disparities among blacks and Latinos.

The YMCA will work with the city of Cleveland and Cleveland State University to offer monthly health and fitness screenings, nutrition education and exercise programs at 12 city-owned recreation centers starting early next year, said Barbara Clint, director of community health and advocacy at the YMCA.

Cleveland State will help provide the health screenings and will enter the patient information into a database so that it can be tracked and analyzed, Ms. Clint said. Other partners in the project include NEON Health Services, the Fairview/Lakewood/Lutheran Hospital Parish Nurse program, MetroHealth Medical Center and the Diabetes Association of Greater Cleveland.

"We're trying to monitor (the patients) to see if we are making an impact and a lifestyle change in attitudes and behavior among people in the program," Mr. Haley said.

The idea, Ms. Clint said, is to offer wellness programs in a setting that is more familiar to inner-city residents, many of whom don't seek health care unless they go to the emergency room.

The YMCA also received a two-year, \$80,000 grant to implement diabetes programs at YMCA branches early next year, she said.

Now that the YMCA is posting a small profit, it is in talks with local cities to jointly build YMCA branches, Mr. Haley said. On the drawing board are YMCA branches in North Olmsted and North Royalton, as well as a new YMCA that would serve Richmond Heights, South Euclid and University Heights, he said.

The YMCA is considering building a new site in Cleveland's Kinsman neighborhood as part of the Cleveland Metropolitan

Housing Authority's plan to construct a public housing community on Kinsman Road between East 69th and East 79th streets, said Jeffery K. Patterson, chief of staff and operations at the CMHA.

The housing authority has applied for a \$20 million federal grant to help finance the \$90 million to \$100 million project, Mr. Patterson said. He expects to

finance the rest through various sources, such as bonds.

Mr. Haley admits the Kinsman neighborhood likely would not have a lot of people who could afford YMCA memberships, which generally provide 85% of the Greater Cleveland YMCA's revenue. However, he said a branch there would allow the nonprofit to continue to provide programs such as child care to the needy, which is part of the organization's mission. He said the YMCA would rely on more profitable locations to provide the \$200,000 to \$300,000 a year needed to subsidize a Kinsman YMCA.

Unprofitable locations are partly what caused the Greater Cleveland YMCA's financial difficulties in recent years, Mr. Haley said. The YMCA saw its largest loss of \$2.4 million in 2003, but will turn a profit of about \$300,000 in 2007, he said.

In the meantime, the YMCA next June will break ground on a 67,000-square-foot location in Avon, which this month passed a levy that would raise \$8 million to build the YMCA, Mr. Haley said. The YMCA will raise the remaining \$5.6 million needed to build the site, which is expected to open in December 2009.

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