

YMCA back in shape



Geoff Knox of Lakewood and others enjoy the exercise room at the new YMCA in Lakewood that opened in December. It is just one example of the Y's many collaborative projects.

THOMASONDREY | THE PLAIN DEALER

After years of struggling, local organization is turning things around with new partners

BARB GALBINCEA
Plain Dealer Reporter

For the first time in at least a decade, the YMCA of Greater Cleveland expects to finish the year in the black.

That's a major turnaround for an organization that, as recently as 2003, posted a loss of more than \$2 million and had been drawing from its endowment to make ends meet.

Glenn Haley, president and

chief executive of the YMCA since 2004, says financial stability is just part of the payoff from a three-year plan that has left the Y a stronger force in the community.

"The Y is a different Y today than when I came here," he said. "In order to be relevant, you've got to be healthy and whole."

Not only does the YMCA look different — after the closing of some branches, the opening of others and the sale, or pending sale, of two more buildings — but also it acts differently, according to Haley.

For one thing, there's an increased focus on collaboration. The new Lakewood branch, which opened in December, is a partnership with the city of Lakewood, the Cleveland Clinic and Lakewood Hospital. The city

pledged more than \$600,000 to the project, rather than go into the often risky recreation-center business itself.

"It seemed like a perfect match," said Mayor Tom George, who added that the heavily used branch has become a community gathering place. "The real balance is providing quality service in an efficient manner."

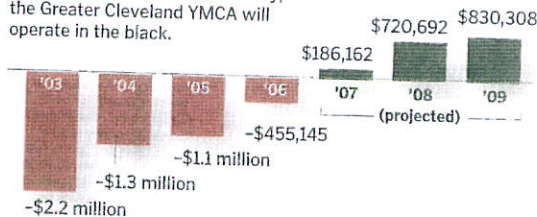
Avon and the YMCA are partnering to raise money for a recreation center in the Lorain County community, and the organization is in talks with the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority about a collaborative project to open a new Y building in Cleveland's Garden Valley-Kinsman area. The Y also is discussing collaborations with several Cuyahoga County suburbs.

When Haley came here from a Y in Birmingham, Ala., Greater Cleveland's YMCA already had been struggling for years.

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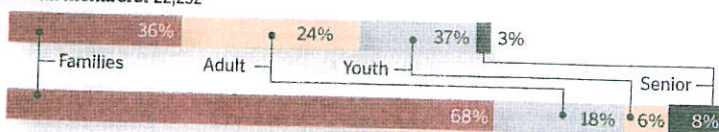
On the road to financial stability ...

For the first time in recent history, the Greater Cleveland YMCA will operate in the black.



... while attracting more families and seniors

2003 total members: 22,232



2006 total members: 33,046

SOURCE: YMCA of Greater Cleveland

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BRIGHT FUTURE: Big plans where YMCAs are located and proposals for new facilities. **A6**



PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS ONDREY | THE PLAIN DEALER

Sidney Dixon of Lakewood dabbles in the Lakewood Y's pool as part of a summer sports camp.

YMCA

FROM A1

Organization gets a makeover

The Cleveland Heights branch was closed in 1999, and by 2003 only two of the Y's 12 branches were breaking even. The buildings themselves were old, with a median age of about 50, meaning they needed lots of costly maintenance or repairs.

A 2005 survey of nearly 6,500 members of the YMCA of Greater Cleveland showed that 27 percent rated their overall satisfaction with the organization as excellent. That compared with a 39 percent rating at YMCAs nationwide.



Haley

And battles over closing underperforming branches to trim costs left the Y with a tarnished reputation.

Even today, several years after the Glenville branch closed, Cleveland City Councilman Kevin Conwell said his constituents feel abandoned.

"It was a huge blow," said Conwell, who blames Haley's predecessor for not doing enough to save urban neighborhood branches.

Haley insists that the Y's commitment to the city of Cleveland remains strong, and he said the organization is targeting programming for the neediest neighborhoods.

To avoid the financial problems that doomed other inner-city branches, the Y wants to build an endowment to help support the hoped-for Garden Valley-Kinsman facility.

Haley also said he's proud that in reinventing itself, the Y has maintained its commitment to Y-Haven, a program that serves homeless men, most with substance abuse problems.

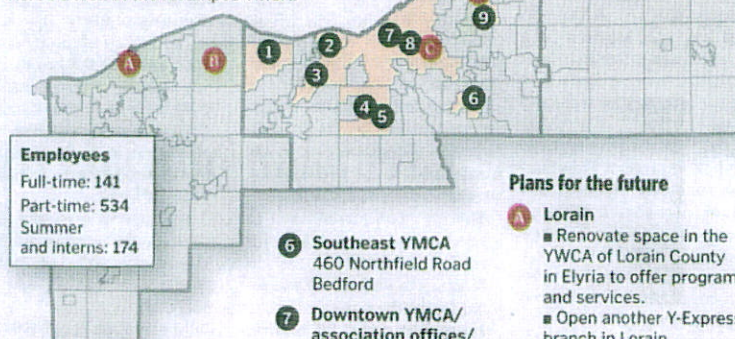
By Sept. 1, the Y expects to wrap up the sale of its 136,000-square-foot downtown branch. Built in 1911, the building was renovated for \$12 million in 1998. The resulting debt was costing the organization about \$300,000 a year, according to Haley.

The buyer, whom Haley de-

YMCA looks to brighter future

The YMCA of Greater Cleveland has streamlined its operations, closing some buildings and opening others, over the last three years as part of a plan to achieve financial stability. Now the organization is ready to extend its reach even farther, working with a variety of partners to bring new programs to the city and suburbs.

Here's a look at the revamped YMCA:



Employees
Full-time: 141
Part-time: 534
Summer and Interns: 174

YMCA of Greater Cleveland locations

- 1 West Shore YMCA
1575 Columbia Road
Westlake
- 2 Lakewood YMCA
16915 Detroit Ave.
Lakewood
- 3 West Park-Fairview YMCA
15501 Lorain Ave.
Cleveland
- 4 Y-Express
Parmatown Mall
Parma
- 5 Ridgewood YMCA
6840 Ridge Road
Parma
- 6 Southeast YMCA
460 Northfield Road
Bedford
- 7 Downtown YMCA/
association offices/
Community Youth
Services
2200 Prospect Ave.
Cleveland
- 8 Y-Haven
6001 Woodland Ave.
Cleveland
- 9 Hillcrest YMCA
5000 Mayfield Road
Lyndhurst
- 10 Euclid YMCA
631 Babbitt Road
Euclid
- 11 Geauga YMCA
12460 Bass Lake Road
Chardon

Plans for the future

- A Lorain
 - Renovate space in the YWCA of Lorain County in Elyria to offer programs and services.
 - Open another Y-Express branch in Lorain
- B Avon
 - Establish a full-service membership branch in Avon with the city as a partner.
- C Cleveland
 - Establish a facility in the Garden Valley/Kinsman neighborhood, working with the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority.
- D Richmond Heights, South Euclid, University Heights and South Euclid-Lyndhurst School District
 - In talks about a collaborative recreation facility.

SOURCE: YMCA of Greater Cleveland



cleveland.com/pdgraphics for this and other Plain Dealer graphics.

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clined to identify, will lease space to the YMCA to continue its membership branch there, but the new landlord will take over operation of the 148 apartments.

In June, the Y sold its Brooklyn facility to the Pearl Community Investment Corp. The Y plans to lease space there for child care and youth and other programs next year.

The Glenville Y was donated to a community group. The Miles Avenue branch building was transferred to the city of Cleveland's Parks and Recreation Department. And the West Side YMCA on Franklin Boulevard was sold to a developer.

Haley said the organization's board members — most of whom are new since 2004 — have mapped a 15-year strategic plan meant to keep the Y on track financially, serve members better, address the region's needs, underscore the Y's contributions to Northeast Ohio's economy and repair public perception.

Programming will be holistic — aimed at everything from health to education and childhood obesity.

"It's not just gym and swim," Haley said. "As change happens



Swimming instructor Jordan Hoile clowning around with student Josh Patterson, 6, of Lakewood, at the Lakewood YMCA.

in a city, we have to be just as innovative and cutting-edge."

Not surprisingly, that innovation is likely to cost a lot of money — maybe \$30 million or more over the next five years, including the new Cleveland facility and renovations to the older branches.

But Haley is confident the Y will raise the needed support.

"I believe in this city," he said. "And I believe in what we do."

For more information about the YMCA of Greater Cleveland, go to clevelandymca.org.

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ARTHRITIS INFORMATION

For information on support groups, self-help classes and other information, call the Arthritis Foundation, 216-831-7000.