



**By Photo by Ed Hopfmann 4/14/08 FRAMINGHAM STANDALONE Exterior of the MetroWest YMCA undergoing renovations inside and addition outside (left). 'P...**

## **The YMCA is growing**

**By John Hilliard**

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Framingham -

FRAMINGHAM - The MetroWest YMCA is expanding its health service programming in its largest-ever fundraising campaign to upgrade the organization's facilities in Framingham and Hopkinton.

"YMCA is a key resource (for) the community," said Jean McAllister, president and CEO of the MetroWest YMCA.

She said the YMCA is working to raise \$3.5 million over the next 12 months to upgrade their properties in Framingham and Hopkinton, as part of an \$8 million project that includes both areas. This is the biggest single fundraiser the local agency has ever done, she said.

At the Framingham facility, located at 200 Old Connecticut Path, an expansion adds an extra 10,000 square feet of space to the nearly 50-year old facility, plus make it handicapped accessible, she said. The Framingham project includes an expansion of wellness and physical fitness programs for kids and families.

In the Hopkinton building, located at 45 East St., the YMCA's summer camp, which serves 650 kids a day, renovations of several camp buildings have been completed, plus a new outdoor swimming pool and other facilities will be added.

Is this a good time for the MetroWest YMCA to undertake an ambitious expansion?

While health club membership grew dramatically between 1995 and 2004, from 24.1 million to 41.3 million, according to the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association, the growth in membership showed signs of reaching a plateau, with no

measurable increase for the following year.

However, the YMCA expansion may be well-timed for some trends that have been noted in fitness activity.

According to the American College of Sports Medicine, 2007's top fitness and recreational sports trends include more of a focus on children and obesity, as well as exercise for seniors.

According to the report, obesity in children is now recognized as a major health issue in both developed and developing countries. The college views this as an issue likely to be increasingly addressed in commercial and community health clubs instead of public school systems.

It also notes that strength training to develop more muscle mass is gaining popularity with all ages and both sexes.

In 2006, more than 14,000 people participated in YMCA programs aimed to maintain wellness and health, while 300 volunteers worked fundraising, policy making and other roles.

Marty Cohen, president of the MetroWest Community Health Care Foundation, said the YMCA's health and wellness programs offer important services to families who otherwise could not afford a membership to a private health club. He pointed to the YMCA's Cardiokids program, which encourages cardiovascular health, as an important program.

The foundation offered a \$250,000 grant to the YMCA, plus a \$250,000 challenge grant. Other corporate sponsors include Middlesex Savings Bank, which donated \$100,000.

(John Hilliard can be reached at 508-626-4449 or [jhilliar@cnc.com](mailto:jhilliar@cnc.com).)