

The Plainfield YMCA – A Lifesaving Community Organization Since 1872



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PLAINFIELD, NJ – For over 140 years, the Plainfield YMCA has been working to strengthen and meet the needs of the community and surrounding areas. Established in 1872 – just five years after Plainfield Township itself was founded and located at 518 Watchung Avenue since 1929 – the Plainfield Y is much more than a recreation and wellness center.

While the Plainfield YMCA does feature an indoor heated swimming pool, basketball courts, running track, fitness center and free-weight room, it also serves as community leader in social services, providing much-needed assistance and support to low-income families.

“There’s a misconception that the YMCA is just a place for recreation. In a suburban area, they are gyms and pool and tend to be quality of life organizations, which is important, but the difference in an urban Y is that you are saving lives,” said Ravenell Williams IV, president and CEO of the Plainfield site. “We are a community service agency that is making a difference in the lives of children and adults. We are literally saving lives.”

The YMCA operates under four different initiatives: Reduce Homelessness; Reduce Childhood Obesity; Promote Health and Wellness; and Prevent Downing. In meeting these goals, the Plainfield Y offers a variety of services, including but not limited to, after school activities, aquatics, senior programs, social service programs, summer day camp, wellness classes and a youth development center comprised of computer training, wellness/nutrition or swim/water safety programs for children in preschool through sixth grade.

The 55,000-square-foot, three-story building also features a 35-bed homeless shelter and, up until three months ago, was one of only three Y’s in the country to run a foster care program for infants through 17

years of age. Additionally, there are plans to convert space on the second and third floors into 30 efficiency apartments for children ages 18 to 24 who are aging out of foster care.

“The newest and largest homeless population in New Jersey is made up of kids who have aged out of foster care,” said Williams. “There are very little housing programs available with support services attached. We will be just the third in the state to offer housing of this kind.”

On a local front, the YMCA works closely with the Plainfield and North Plainfield communities. In addition to providing after-school childcare throughout the communities it serves, including in North Plainfield at the Watchung Presbyterian Church, the organization welcomes local students throughout the year who utilize its swimming pool for physical education classes.

“Around 40 percent of people with color do not know how to swim and there is a lot of youth drowning among urban kids. Statistically, they drown a lot more than their Caucasian peers,” said Williams. “So the fact that we are teaching urban kids how to swim is literally saving lives.”

In 2012, the YMCA partnered with the Plainfield Country Club for its First Tee Program and, this fall, expanded the program to North Plainfield students; First Tee features educational programs that build character, instill life enhancing values and promote healthy choices through the game of golf. Currently, 18 students from North Plainfield Middle and High School are involved in the First Tee Program.

Additionally, just last month, the Plainfield YMCA held its first Achievers meeting; offered in conjunction with the Westfield Area Y, the Achievers program inspires youth in high school throughout Union County – including North Plainfield students in 9th through 12th grade – to become leaders in their community and achieve academic excellence.

“The Achievers program gives participants a sense of purpose, self esteem and the skills to succeed. College scholarships are available as well as opportunity to experience areas of career interest and free SAT preparation,” said Ravenell. “The most important benefit of this program is when career and educational opportunity is felt and achieved.”

In September, Unity Bank of North Plainfield hosted a community reception that provided leaders from the community the opportunity to learn more about the YMCA and the role it plays in the North Plainfield community. Close to 40 people attended the community awareness event, which was held at the Somerset Street bank, including North Plainfield Mayor Michael Giordano Jr., administrators and members of the Borough Council, along with representatives from the fire department, North Plainfield School District and Education Foundation, local religious organizations and the library.

“This provided us an opportunity to introduce the Y to North Plainfield and let leaders in the town know all we are doing,” said Williams, who along with staff and members of the YMCA's board of directors were on hand to discuss different programs offered to North Plainfield youth. “We hope that by getting to

know more about us, leaders of the North Plainfield community will help promote the Y and spread the word about all the programs and the good we do.”

All of the programs and services the YMCA provides are funded through financial support received from individuals, foundations, government assistance, community partnerships and program fees. The funding received also enables the Y to maintain its nearly 100-year-old building. “A donation of \$1,200 will help support a family for a month in a shelter while \$2,800 provides childcare for nine months and \$170 provides a week of summer camp,” said Williams, adding, the YMCA is an investment in community. “We truly make a difference, right here, in the communities we serve,” he said.

The Plainfield YMCA is open Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Saturday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information on the Plainfield YMCA, visit <http://www.plainfielddy.org>, stop by 518 Watchung Avenue or call 908-756-6060. You can also follow the Plainfield Y on Facebook; just search ‘Plainfield Area YMCA.’