



Dear Friends,

When most people hear “YMCA” they typically think of gyms, pools and that song by the *Village People*, but we are so much more. Many don’t realize that the YMCA of Delaware is a nonprofit organization that serves thousands of local children and teens, prevents chronic diseases, and creates a community for all. In fact, this year we celebrate 175 years of impact across the globe.

The first YMCA was founded in London in 1844 by young people who were determined to address the social challenges impacting their community. Today, as one of the largest nonprofits in the world serving 58 million people in 119 countries, the Y continues to bring people from all walks of life together to create a better world for all.

On the heels of our first Global Teens experience in London and Paris, I am proud to see our very own young people representing our YMCA on a global stage, investigating some of the key issues facing our society today and beginning to take action in their own communities. The YMCA’s global impact would not be possible without the hard work, dedication and commitment we see in local communities and around the world. I want to thank you for being a part of this global movement and for helping build a stronger Delaware.



Yours In Service,

Deborah Bagatta-Bowles  
Chief Executive Officer



## A Welcoming and Safe Place For All

The YMCA of Delaware is an inclusive organization open to all. **We welcome all people** regardless of ability, age, background, ethnicity, race, faith, gender, gender identity or sexual orientation.

The Y believes that, in a diverse world, we are stronger when we are inclusive, when our doors are open to all and when everyone has the opportunity to learn, grow and thrive.

The YMCA is an association of people of all ages, ethnic groups and religious affiliations that strives to cultivate the human potential, self-esteem, and dignity of all people. Our organization exists to develop and practice the Christian principles of love, caring, inclusiveness, justice and peace...and to enrich the emotional, physical and social life of all individuals, families and our community.





# YMCA AND AUTISM DELAWARE TEAM UP TO OFFER SWIMMING PROGRAM FOR PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

Taylor Deyman and Ryan Stansell.

We are excited to announce a new partnership with Autism Delaware, offering a water safety program to children and adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Through this collaboration, Autism Delaware provides training to YMCA swim instructors and in exchange, the YMCA will provide S.W.A.M. (Swimming With Autism) sessions to the community. Currently the program is underway at the Brandywine, Downtown Wilmington and Sussex Ys, with plans to expand to all Delaware locations in the near future.

Knowledge of water safety is critical for individuals with autism because they tend to be drawn to water due to its sensory nature. People with autism are known to wander or bolt (also called “elope”) and face a huge risk if they go near water. According to the National Autism Association, drowning accounts for approximately 90 percent of deaths associated with wandering children with ASD who are under the age of 14.

Teaching water safety to people with autism carries its own set of special considerations. “Swim instructors need to be aware of sensory issues,” said Annalisa Ekbladh, Director of Policy and Family Services at Autism Delaware. “They may be more sensitive to the water and to the noise around them. Cognitive processing speed is another issue, as they may process information differently.”

“At the Y, we believe every child deserves the opportunity to learn how to swim,” said Deborah Bagatta-Bowles, YMCA of Delaware President and CEO. “We save lives every day with our drowning prevention initiatives, teaching important water safety skills to children and adults of all ages, backgrounds

and abilities. We are pleased that our partnership with Autism Delaware will allow us to expand our services to people with autism, helping to put parents’ minds at ease and teach children how to be confident and have fun in the water safely.”

Parents at the Brandywine Y applauded the decision to expand S.W.A.M. Melissa Stansell said her 13-year old son, Ryan, is now ready to take his survival and recreational swimming to a competitive level.

“Ryan has always loved the water,” says Melissa Stansell. With the patience and perseverance of the instructors, he is able to participate fully with his peers, giving him more opportunity for inclusion. Kudos and thanks to Autism Delaware and the Y for this amazing program!”

Kala Montgomery has also seen her son benefit from the S.W.A.M. program at Brandywine. “I’ve seen Traycen’s self-esteem and confidence bloom with each passing week,” she noted.

“Through this collaboration with the YMCA, we are now providing safe, inclusive, recreational swimming opportunities throughout the year,” said Brian Hall, Autism Delaware Executive Director “This is the kind of opportunity that helps build community acceptance.”

Parents and caregivers who would like to enroll a loved one in a S.W.A.M. program should directly contact the aquatics department at their local Delaware YMCA.

## MISSION MOMENT: JEANIE DONOFRIO

If swim instructor Jeanie Donofrio had her way, everyone would be in the pool. “Swim for life” is her mantra, and you won’t find a more enthusiastic champion of the water programs at the Sussex Family YMCA.

When Jeanie was a young, single mother, she was looking for a place to exercise that offered child care for her daughter, but she didn’t think she could afford to join a gym. A coworker encouraged Jeanie to apply for the YMCA’s Open Doors Financial Assistance program. She was eligible for the program and soon started to take Zumba classes at the Bear YMCA.

“I loved the energy there. They had dance parties and great activities in the Kids Zone. Plus, I met amazing people from all walks of life,” said Jeanie.

In 2014, Jeanie and her family moved to Rehoboth and she began working at the Sussex Family YMCA as a lifeguard. She quickly realized that water safety is of the utmost importance in a beach community and took on a new position as a swim instructor.

In the fall of 2018, her daughter Gianna started swimming for the

Sussex Family Y Tsunami Swim Team. “She loves it,” Jeanie said. “Gianna will even come in to swim on her off days. She tried other sports, but this is the first one that really clicked.”

When Gianna isn’t working on her butterfly stroke, she is volunteering to help out in her sister Angie’s preschool swim classes. Jeanie sees how these activities have helped her daughters develop socially as they make new friends and strengthen the bonds they have made at school.

“There really is something for everyone here.” However, Jeanie still thinks that water sports can and should be a part of everyone’s program. “Swimming is for people of all ages... one to one-hundred. You can swim before you can walk, and when your joints fail and you can’t do other activities, you can still get into the water and get a good workout.”

The YMCA of Delaware is committed to saving lives and educating the community about safety around water. Every year, people, young and old, drown in swimming pools, lakes, and oceans. Through the Y’s Water Wise program, more than 10,000 children in Delaware have learned life-saving, water safety skills.



## FREE MEMBERSHIPS FOR 7TH GRADERS!

The YMCA of Delaware is now offering free one-year memberships to students in the seventh grade who live or attend a school in the state of Delaware. To register, students need to bring a school ID, class roster, or recent report card along with a parent or guardian to a local YMCA branch. After registering, seventh-graders will have the opportunity to use the YMCA’s facilities to swim, play in the gym, work out in the fitness center, participate in a group exercise class, or enjoy teen activities. Additionally, students have the chance to participate in YMCA youth programs, classes and sports.

“Seventh grade is a transitional time for many youth. At the Y we think it’s crucial to set the foundation for a healthy lifestyle at a young age,” said Jim Kelly, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer for the YMCA of Delaware. “Around this age, kids are usually given more freedom to choose how they spend their free time and we want to encourage kids to make good decisions and form healthy habits.”

As young people become exposed to adolescent challenges, they are more likely to begin distancing themselves from formal organizations, friends and family to experiment with unhealthy behaviors. The Seventh Grade initiative offers an alternative, where they can make new friends while staying active and also avoiding exposure to counter-productive behaviors.

For more information about the YMCA of Delaware’s Seventh Grade initiative, visit [www.ymcade.org](http://www.ymcade.org).





# THE Y FOR ALL

Our professional fitness trainers at the YMCA of Delaware have been busy hitting the books and the weight bench at the same time. Funding from the Chichester duPont Foundation now makes it possible for each branch to train at least two staff as Certified Inclusive Fitness Trainers through the American College of Sports Medicine. The Certified Inclusive Fitness Trainer will be able to systematically address physical barriers experienced by individuals with disabilities like Sharon Schneider, who believed medical issues from a previous health concern would prevent her from exercising.

“Coming to the Y has improved my walking. I feel so much stronger and I really enjoy coming to the Y,” Schneider says. “I take a lot of medicine because of Diabetes, but working out at the Y has been the best medicine. Many times I am tired before I come, but after my workout, I feel fantastic.”

That’s exactly what Terri Borkland, Fitness Center Director at the Brandywine Y, wants to hear. Borkland, is among those who recently passed the extensive certification test to better serve people who may benefit from adapted fitness equipment or programs.

In addition to the newly certified trainers, many YMCA of Delaware locations provide special adaptive fitness equipment, specialized programming and even an overhead suspension system that allows individuals with physical challenges to participate in group exercise classes, walk on a treadmill, and/or perform other exercises from an assisted standing position.

“Being at the Y has improved my stamina and has let me celebrate the things that I can do rather than dwell on the things I cannot do. I am very grateful for the Y,” says Brandywine YMCA member Sue Olson.

According to the Delaware State Department of Health and Social Services, twelve percent of Delawareans have a disability that places them at risk for health complications. Borkland says trainers with the inclusive certification can bridge the gap and make a true difference in the lives of those who have medical issues ranging from hearing and sight impairments to cerebral palsy, Parkinson’s disease, arthritis, and other physical complications.



Sharon Schneider uses the overhead suspension system at the YMCA to assist her with walking on the treadmill.

# WESTERN FAMILY YMCA WELCOMES NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



The YMCA of Delaware is pleased to welcome Thomas Wallace Sr. as the new Executive Director of the Western Family YMCA branch.

Wallace joins the YMCA of Delaware’s team with more than 14 years of experience, serving in leadership roles at YMCA branches in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Wallace rose through the YMCA ranks, holding many positions which include Wellness Director, Senior Program Director, Director of Operations, Associate Executive Director, and Executive Director at two branches. Wallace brings a track record of data-driven results, growth in membership and program revenue, improvement in customer service and staff satisfaction while furthering the mission of the YMCA through collaboration with area businesses and community organizations.

“I am thrilled to have a dedicated YMCA veteran with such a wealth of experience joining our Executive Leadership Team,” said YMCA Chief Operating Officer, Jim Kelly.

Kelly expects Wallace to have a major impact on the Western Y and looks forward to his service as the new Executive Director.

# GLOBAL TEENS CELEBRATE YMCA 175 IN LONDON

In early August, the YMCA of Delaware’s first cohort of Global Teens headed to London to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the Y. Sixteen young people from Delaware YMCAs attended the YMCA 175 conference held in the city where the world-wide movement was founded. The Delaware contingent joined 600 young adults from across the United States, where a total of 3,200 YMCA members from 120 countries, representing six continents were in attendance.

“A lot of our young people have never even been on an airplane or traveled outside of Delaware, so this was their first time doing things like applying for a passport,” said Walnut Street Y Program Director Anesha Truesdale.

YMCA 175’s dynamic Global Youth Event featured over 150 hours of workshops, seminars and panel sessions along with daily devotions and an opening plenary for the thousands of YMCA youth leaders, volunteers and staff. The event aimed to connect the YMCA global movement, strengthen cross-cultural understanding, celebrate 175 years of the YMCA’s impact, and develop solutions to address today’s social challenges.

During the conference, our Global Teens learned about global challenges such as climate change, civic engagement, workforce development, public health and education. We also furthered partnerships with YMCAs across the globe and

hope to send our second cohort of Global Teens to Sao Paulo, Brazil next summer!

“This was such a transformative experience. While at YMCA 175, I met people from countries I’d always learned about. We were able to connect through similarities and create unforgettable friendships,” said Dorcas Olantunji, Global Teen participant. “My love and dedication to the Y has only grown since this trip and I am excited to continue to advocate and work with the Y this coming year.”

“YMCA 175 taught me that the Y goes far beyond my Y story and the YMCA of Delaware,” said Talley Ridgeway, Global Teen participant. “With intentional collaboration, there is the possibility for change locally and globally.”

Throughout the trip, the Global teens used cameras and their cell phones to interview attendees at the conference. They are currently working together to produce a video about their experience with young people from around the world. Once complete, a premier night will be scheduled for viewing the YMCA 175 video.

Many of our teens would not have been able to participate in this experience without the generous support of our donors. For more information on making a donation to the Global Teens program, contact Matt Clements at [mclements@ymcade.org](mailto:mclements@ymcade.org).



Top Left: Teens excitedly wait to board the plane to London. Bottom Left: Ellen Ohlhauser, from the YMCA in Germany, spoke with our Global Teens about modern day slavery and human trafficking. Right: Teens riding the London Eye.



# 31ST ANNUAL BLACK ACHIEVERS GALA

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2019**

Cocktail Hour 6 p.m.  
Program begins at 7 p.m.

Waterfall Banquet  
and Conference Center  
3416 Philadelphia Pike  
Claymont, DE 19703

For tickets and sponsorship  
information, visit  
[www.ymcade.org/blackachievers](http://www.ymcade.org/blackachievers).

## DOVER YMCA GIFT PROGRAM

It's all about girl power! Thanks to a state-funded grant called GIFT, that's Girls in Fitness Together, the Dover YMCA is teaching girls from Dover, Caesar Rodney, and Polytech High Schools how to make better choices in all aspects of their lives while incorporating physical fitness. Girls enrolled in GIFT meet twice a week for two hours to hold open discussions, participate in physical activities, and to enjoy a healthy snack. During the course of the program, the girls make new friends, try new activities, and work on interpersonal skills. Completing a community service project is also a part of the program, focusing on building self-confidence while inspiring the girls to make conscious decisions about living a healthy life.

"The girls feel a sense of belonging and enjoy being a part of the YMCA," says Senior Program Director Sheri Minear. The GIFT program was expanded this summer to allow girls ages 13-17 to participate in multiple weeks of camps offered at the Dover branch. At the camps, the girls were challenged to do many exciting first-time physical activities like rock climbing.

Dedicated staff members, who serve as role models to the girls, help them develop a sense of self-empowerment while also learning the importance of giving back to their communities and becoming leaders. The real gift given to the young ladies in the GIFT program is its overall theme; girls can do anything if they stay focused, stay physically fit and make healthy lifestyle choices while being conscious, good citizens.



Featured Speaker:

**LISA THOMAS LAURY**

Retired Philadelphia News  
Anchor and author of *On  
Camera and Off, When the News  
is Good and When it's Not.*

## BEST SUMMER EVER!

Each summer, children and counselors from seven Y camps across Delaware come together at the Hanby Outdoor Center and celebrate. This year's focus was about getting to know someone new. Campers exchanged kindness bracelets with kids from other groups and were encouraged to learn more about their new friends. We were honored to have Representative Debra Heffernan join us and are thankful for her support of the Y!







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“When you donate  
to the Y, you  
**give opportunities.**”

- Travis Nock,  
YMCA Member

To hear Travis' Y story, visit [www.ymcade.org/Travis](http://www.ymcade.org/Travis).