

**For The News-Herald editorial page
By Dick Bennett, CEO and Executive Director, Lake County Y**



The Y -- a refreshed identity; mission and values remain the same

I have some very exciting news about our Lake County YMCA!

For the first time in 43 years, our national YMCA has unveiled a new brand strategy – the results of more than two years of analysis. This new strategy is designed to change how the Y talks about itself so that people better understand the benefits of engaging with the Y and to make stronger connections with the communities we serve.

For those of us who work at the Y, workout at the Y, participate in programs at the Y, changing the name to “the Y” seems like a non-event. That’s how many of us – including people in our community – have referred to the organization for years.

The refreshed Y logo retains the triangle (symbolizing spirit, mind, and body - the foundational elements of the Y), and includes “YMCA” to create a stronger connection between our name and visual identity. Most important, our name remains the same – Lake County YMCA.

There are some people in the local community who have expressed concern that the change to calling ourselves “the Y” may also mean a change in our mission and values. As CEO and Executive Director of the Lake County YMCA, I can tell you that our commitment, mission and values have not changed and will not change. Our mission continues to be to put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind and body for all. Every day, we work side-by-side with our neighbors to make sure that everyone, regardless of age, income or background, has the opportunity to learn, grow and thrive. We remain steadfast in serving our community. Consider just a few facts from the past year:

- In these difficult economic times, remarkably, this year membership assistance was offered to nearly 30% more people in need than in the previous year.
- Support from our donors to the annual Strong Kids Campaign, from the United Way of Lake County and from foundations has allowed the Y to serve 6,500 people in need with membership assistance, to send kids to camp and help families in need of Child Care.

- The Y served nearly 48,000 individuals of all ages and is more than just a place to workout. It provides a variety of outstanding programs and has become a haven to many children and families.

Strong principles guide our actions and programs. In announcing the change, Neil Nicoll, president and CEO of the YMCA of the USA, pointed out that for 160 years “we’ve focused on changing lives for the better. Our commitment to building greater awareness for the important work we do will enable us to expand our efforts and further strengthen communities across the country.”

As for the name change, I have one final comment. We are not alone in adapting our brand to revitalize and simplify ourselves. The General Electric Company is simply GE ... Kentucky Fried Chicken is now KFC – and the list goes on. The new logo and look for the Y reflects our vibrancy and diversity. And although names are important to branding, it is what’s behind the name that counts. Our goal is to work together with our Y Board and employees, our volunteers and the community – just as we have always done – to improve our health, strengthen our families and support our neighbors. We’re excited about the future of our Lake County YMCA and hope the community will continue to share our enthusiasm.

Dick Bennett is CEO and Executive Director of the Lake County YMCA.