BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS DAILY

For Dana Swisher and her son Logan Thomas, every day at the Eugene Family YMCA is a good day.

That’s because the Y is the perfect playground for Logan to practice navigating with a cane, gain core strength to support his curved spine, manage his autism and gain social skills with people who care about him. Logan has Bardet Biedl Syndrome, a condition that affects only 1 in 160,000 people.

“The Y changed everything,” Dana says. “Shortly after we joined, we came home from the Y and Logan was enthusiastic about being a member. It wasn’t just a building with machines in it anymore; it was a building with people and he was one of the people.”

The mother-son duo have been members since 2015. Logan’s shown significant progress in the last 5 years. continued on page 6

ON TRACK FOR A HEALTHIER FUTURE

Syndee West wanted to enroll in the YMCA’s Diabetes Prevention Program with her dad, but his disease was too advanced for the program, which serves people with prediabetes.

“My dad didn’t qualify, but he was so encouraging,” Syndee says. “He told me to go for it, learn everything you can and bring back tidbits of information for me.”

Frank West struggled with diabetes, and he hoped Syndee, 49, would stave off the disease. Syndee began the year-long group program in January 2019.

“My dad was my motivator because I was noticing how diabetes was affecting him,” she says. “Honestly, I had not paid enough attention to my signs and symptoms of rising blood sugar.”

Just a little more than a month into Syndee’s enrollment in the program, Frank died from complications from diabetes. It was devastating for Syndee, who had anticipated working together to stay healthy.

Syndee leaned on the other participants in the YMCA’s Diabetes Prevention Program while she continued on page 6
ANNUAL HALLOWEEN PARTY STRENGTHENS OUR CONNECTIONS

At the Y, strengthening community is our purpose. We do this by welcoming and inviting everyone to participate in activities that support them and allow them to connect with other community members.

Your Y’s free SPOOKTACULAR Halloween party is one essential way we strengthen our community.

“Opening our doors for good family fun is just what the Y does,” said Eugene Family YMCA Youth Development Director, Holly Kriz-Anderson. “Our annual Halloween party is an event families look forward to because it’s fun, safe and a great introduction to healthy physical activity.”

Your Y handed out smiles, fun and healthy snacks to 800-plus people! Spiderman was seen swimming in the Y pool, a slice of pizza played Halloween bingo and Harry Potter was spotted casting spells on jousting superheroes. Even those with elaborate costumes came to the Tennis Center for facepaint on their cheeks.

Those who attended might have seen a dinosaur playing tennis, unicorns jumping in the bounce house, and princesses—oh, so many princesses!—in the movement center, where staff created a disco party room.

For one dad, the Halloween evening provided a safe, welcoming space for his young son, who wants to dress like a princess and feel safe about his gender expression.

“This is what we are all about,” Holly says. “The Y strives to be the place where everyone can be who they want to be.”

THE Y, PIVOTAL IN HUGH’S LIFE

Hugh Prichard gained vital work experience as a teenager at his hometown YMCA in Long Beach, California.

“I was first offered a summer job as a camp counselor,” Hugh says. “This gave me the experience and confidence to work with children and, the next year, I became the leader of the Summer Fun Club.”

It was a life-changing summer for Hugh, who was responsible for planning the field trips, supervising all of the activities and driving the fun-loving, singing kids from place to place.

“These positive experiences with kids led me to my first job after graduating from UCLA; teaching elementary school in Los Angeles,” he says. “Then I moved on to Eugene, where I worked in three elementary schools.”

Because of his positive experiences, Hugh sought out the Eugene Family YMCA, became a member and attended classes with one of his sons. His involvement grew until Hugh served on the board in the early 1980s.

Now, in the midst of the Y’s Capital Campaign, Hugh and his wife Sue called upon their friends to support the new Y. It was a generous and fruitful effort—one that will make a significant difference for the future of the Y. (see more on pages 4 and 5)
Y SUPPORT THROUGH ADVERSITY

LAURA PETTIGREW’S smile lights up the Eugene Family YMCA’s lobby.

As the Membership Services Coordinator, she greets people, helps them with their accounts and finding their classes, and is often the first friend individuals make at the Y.

She cherishes her role because the Y was there for her during the darkest time of her life: escaping an abusive husband who left her bankrupt, homeless and worried about her own safety.

“I don’t know what would have happened if I didn’t have the Y at that time,” Laura says. “My Y family was an extension of my family and even on days when I showed up to work crying, they were supportive... I think that altered the course of my life in a very positive way.”

Laura spent the next year recovering from post-traumatic stress with a therapist recommended by a Y friend. On the heels of her recovery, she was diagnosed with skin cancer.

But again, Laura’s Y family stepped in to support her. Y staff sat with Laura’s mom in the waiting room during Laura’s cancer surgery and Y members checked in on her throughout her recuperation.

“Throughout all of this, I felt so incredibly supported by the Y.”

For almost 9 years, Laura has been a Eugene Family YMCA employee, offering Y members the same kind of support she received.

“My social network has been fully restored and even improved,” she says. “I feel so much love for the people that I see every day and am so grateful for the love I get in return. This has been the perfect place for me to recover, and grow beyond what I imagined.”

Y WELLNESS DIRECTOR RECOGNIZED

Your Y’s own Kim Miller has been named one of the 20 under 40 winners by the Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce.

Kim’s dedication and commitment to the Y values and the wellness of the community earned her this prestigious honor. She started at the Eugene Family YMCA as a personal trainer and Front Desk employee and, during her 16 years here, worked her way up to the Director of Health and Wellness and Healthy Living. In this role, she manages all of the disease-prevention and healthy living programs, more than 100 group fitness classes a week, dozens of specialty fitness classes each year, wellness appointments and free educational lectures for the community. Her position oversees a $300,000 budget and more than 60 employees.

“My commitment to the success of the Y is really more of a commitment to the success of our community,” Kim says. “I see the Y as an extension of my family and I want this to be a good place for my boys and my family and everyone else’s families. I grew up in Eugene and I want it to stay a positive, inclusive place for everyone. If we have a thriving Y, there is nothing our community can’t do.”

Read more online at 20under40awards.com
Why I give to the Y

Susan Heisey has been a Y member for more than 14 years and her son grew up at the Y and then got one of his first jobs at the Y’s Tennis Center and Welcome Center. Her excitement about the new Y facility spurred her to organize an informational fundraiser for friends and clients, which raised thousands of dollars for the THIS IS Y Capital Campaign. Susan is a seasoned Principal Broker and owner of Bailey & Heisey Real Estate.

“Why I give to the Y
development, healthy living and social responsibility. Those aren’t just words—that is how the Y feels when you’re there.”—Susan Heisey, Y member

Sherrill Kirchhoff is a 12-year Y member and the first Legacy Society* donor

“I donate to the Y because of the rich community it provides. The social benefits are the secret sauce of the Y.”—Sherrill Kirchhoff, Y member

End of year giving ideas!

ANNUAL CAMPAIGN

$35 supports 8 swim lessons for a kiddo under age 3

$50 helps a child build confidence in b-ball camp

$78 / month gives a single parent family Y membership

$300 / month supports a family in need of afterschool child care

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

$1,000 gets your Y closer to groundbreaking

$5,000 gives you the opportunity to name a bench at the new facility

$100,000 supports building and naming the new Y’s Playcare

$430 supports an individual in the YMCA’s Diabetes Prevention Program

The Y.™ Giving a brighter future.

eugeneymca.org/donate
DANA AND LOGAN continued from page 1

“We can’t resist coming to the Y every day and it’s coupled with incredible results,” Dana says. “He lost so much weight, and language came on because using your body helps your mind create language.”

Logan’s condition was not obvious when he was born. But Dana’s worries increased as her baby didn’t meet traditional milestones. Logan, now 18, didn’t show emotion until he was 4. He slowly lost sight until, at age 9, he was blind. It wasn’t until age 13 that he began using words.

Those challenges made parenting difficult and Dana found herself socially isolated as well. Y Membership Engagement Specialist Rich Palmieri told Dana that a Y membership might just help her as well as Logan.

“I came into the YMCA and everyone treated us like we were wanted,” Dana recalls. “It was safe. The atmosphere is comfortable. There was a gentleman in a wheelchair and he came right up to me and said, ‘The YMCA is about family.’ That’s what I love about it.”

These days, Logan scans his membership card by himself. He can find the stairs with his cane and go up and down them by himself. He can bounce a basketball in the gym with his mom. And his core strength has improved so much that he can give his mom the bear hug she’s dreamed of getting from her son.

“As a mom, I would like to give Logan something for the rest of his life—a place where everything fits him,” Dana says. “A place where every kind of person comes. The YMCA is that kind of place.”

SYNDEE continued from page 1

grieved. But she never thought of leaving the program: her dad’s death simply made her more committed to reversing her own risk and being a role model for others.

“I vowed to not ever forget that my dad died of complications from diabetes and I need to take better care of myself—for my kids and grandkids,” she says. “I need to do this for him.”

Syndee had significant risk factors. In addition to her family history, Syndee had gestational diabetes when she was pregnant with her youngest child. She was overweight and she could feel her blood sugar spikes. She started to worry when her vision started changing and she felt neuropathy in her feet. Then Syndee’s doctor told her she was prediabetic.

Her participation in the YMCA’s Diabetes Prevention Program has changed everything though.

Syndee has lost 26 pounds since January. Her blood sugar levels are on the decline. And she feels better.

“It’s working,” she says. “The classes keep me focused and on track. The camaraderie, the pats on the back and the group interactions keep me going. It’s a lifeline for me and I want others to know that it can be a lifeline for them. It truly changes lives.”

YMCA’s Diabetes Prevention Program starts again in January
Find out if you qualify: 541.686.9622 or prevention@eugeneymca.org
WOMEN’S BASKETBALL AT THE Y

Women’s basketball may be getting deserved attention now that the Oregon Ducks Women’s Basketball team is ranked No. 1 in the country, but that doesn’t necessarily make it easy for a female to step onto the court in the traditionally male-dominated sport.

It’s why the Eugene Family YMCA has a designated open gym time for women and girls.

“People ask me if there is any basketball time just for women,” says longtime Y basketball player Rebecca Kelley, 51. “Sometimes women simply prefer to play basketball with other women.”

Rebecca has been an organizer of Y women’s pick-up games for years. She’s so dedicated to getting girls and women to play that she texts 50 people every Saturday to remind them to show up on Sundays.

“I honestly like open gym better than league play because, for me, it’s more relaxing,” Rebecca says.

“The age range is 5th grade and middle schoolers to women who are 65 years old. We have fun. We keep score ourselves. It is a really good feeling.”

Miranda Carpenter, 37, has been playing with Rebecca for 18 years.

“I believe having an open gym for women and girls is important because it fosters a safe and competitive atmosphere,” she says. “We vary in age, skill level, and experience; however, we all share the common goals of improving our skills, competing and feeling good about ourselves. It is a judgment-free space and we have a lot of fun.”

It’s the kind of environment Rebecca hopes for.

“I am an encourager,” she says, laughing. “I want to build everyone up. The goal is to ensure everyone can play safely for as long as possible.”

Certainly, the success of the Oregon Women’s Basketball program may inspire more women and girls to participate—watching Sabrina Ionescu recording triple doubles and Ruthy Hebard racking up rebounds is powerful.

Miranda knows that the rising visibility of women’s basketball is good for her two young daughters.

“We are lucky to be living in a community where we get to witness the greatness of the Oregon Women’s program,” Miranda says. “It’s an absolute privilege to have such great role models who are accessible. The players and staff are creating the desire with the younger generation to participate and learn about the game. I hope that the number of girls who try the sport will continue to increase for many years.”

Women’s Open Gym

Every Sunday / 4 – 6 p.m.

The Y has had a dedicated open gym for Women’s Basketball for more than 25 years

Up for a game? Contact Rebecca at 541.870.8433
SUPPORTING AN AMBITIOUS FUTURE

BERNICE KRAKANI is raising two sons, working full-time and attending graduate school at the University of Oregon full-time.

It’s a heavy load, and one that is made more complicated by the fact that she came from Ghana, where it is traditional for women to forgo their own educational goals in order to stay home to raise children.

Bernice lived in Ghana, West Africa, until she was 24. In 2011, she moved to the United States and gave birth to both her children here.

“The burden to take care of family life falls on me because I am the mom,” she says. “And then for me to do all that I am doing and not be able to afford childcare is frustrating.”

The Y offers afterschool care at Buena Vista for her oldest and last year offered preschool care for her youngest.

“**The Y works with me and listens when I need help,**” she says. “**The Y just offers support so that I don’t end up feeling guilty, which is a relief.**”

The programs not only help her navigate her full schedule but also provide a nurturing environment for her boys. Both her boys play sports through the Y.

“I love the swimming embedded in the preschool program,” she says. “I see my son not being scared of the water. He learned real life skills from the Y.”

It’s important to Bernice that her children learn these essential life skills because she has big dreams for her family. She hopes to return to Ghana after she finishes her master’s degree in education and gains some experience in the United States. **Her aspirations are ambitious:** she wants to help preserve native languages and literacy through United Nations programs.

“Most of the countries in West Africa were colonized by the British and the native languages were not valued,” she says. “It’s a tragedy to lose this history. I encourage other parents from this region to teach their children the native language.”

Bernice and her sons speak Ewe at home. Ewe is the name of the language spoken in Ghana by approximately 4.5 million people as a first language. Like many African languages, Ewe is tonal.

“**Having community support through the Y is great. I really rely heavily on financial aid because I need my kids to be in school and supported while I work and finish my education.**”

Bernice shares an African proverb that speaks to her life’s quest: “If you educate a man, you educate one person. If you educate a woman, you educate a whole nation.”

The proverb stems from African families’ emphasis on education for boys and the reality that whole communities suffer when girls and women are denied educational opportunities.

Bernice’s community-minded focus is perfectly aligned with that of the Y. **The Eugene Family YMCA promises to welcome and include everyone** and not turn anyone away due to financial barriers.