



FOREVER GRATEFUL

A Newsletter for Members, Volunteers and Friends of the Y • February 2021

2020 marked year of resilience, but only because of you!

When COVID-19 shuttered businesses for almost 3 months in the spring, generous donors and longtime members made sure that the Eugene Family YMCA could take on the critical need in the community: providing free child care to frontline workers.



Beth Gipson, a nurse at Riverbend, feels so grateful that her son had a safe place to attend online school, make friends and get physical activity through the Y. "I was so relieved to have the extended full-day care so that he could have social time and get a chance to play soccer and I could complete my work day."

When public health guidance limited services due to physical distancing requirements, foundations and benefactors ensured that Y summer camps could keep kids engaged, an Outdoor Studio could be constructed for outdoor group exercise and a virtual hub could be built to meet people's health and wellness needs at home.

When back-to-school marked the first time in the Y's history that child care was extended for the entire day to aid children's online schooling, it was, again, supporters and philanthropists who recognized the need to support the Y's expanded services for youth and families.

You made it possible for the Y to shift its 3-hour per day afterschool enrichment program to a 10-hour, all-day program that incorporated expanded health and safety protocols, increased healthy meals and snacks for kids and increased WiFi capabilities for students to participate in distance learning and receive support for homework. Despite COVID-19 protocols limiting program capacity and space, the cost of delivering all-day care is similar to the cost of delivering afterschool care. At the same time that the Y's costs to run programs and services increased, community needs also rose.

Your altruism meant that the Y was not only able to continue providing critical services to the community in 2020 but could also offer **\$413,506 in financial assistance to more than 3,400 people.**

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"I am humbled to know that these contributions, coupled with a magnificent team, are what impacted the lives of so many families, older adults, children and fitness-seekers."

Humbled by the power of public support

2020 was an incredible year. Not because of the uncertainty and stress, but because of what rose from our collective loss.

So many in our community stepped up in ways never imagined before, solving problems too complicated to foresee.

I am awe-struck by the Y team's ability to overcome significant challenges in order to continue to serve the community in the essential way it has for 134 years.

The Y's inspiring and innovative response was only possible because of generous donors and Y members that were able to maintain their membership dues despite our closed doors. I am humbled to know that these contributions, coupled with a magnificent team, are what impacted the lives of so many families, older adults, children and fitness-seekers.

I invite you to take a moment to read the following stories of people struggling under a global pandemic finding refuge and inspiration at the Y thanks to your support. I believe they will move you as much as they moved me.

I'm looking forward to 2021 as I know that this year will be one of rebuilding, healing, hope and making significant inroads in our efforts to expand our impact.

In appreciation,

Chip Radebaugh
Eugene Family YMCA Board President



Evacuated from wildfires, family finds comfort, child care and community at the Y

Just before midnight on Monday, Sept. 7, Jessica McClurg left her house in Vida with her 10-year-old son and two bags.

In the hour before, she had started packing her bags based on the advice of a friend, who knew that a fire was spreading rapidly in the area. She felt scared and panicky hearing the beeping from her phone that alerted her to a Level 3: Go Now! evacuation notice. It had only been 20 minutes since the Level 2 alert: Be ready to leave at a moment's notice.

She quickly warned guests at 4 cabins across the street knowing that most people don't have cell service so deep in the McKenzie River Valley.

Then she turned her car west on Highway 126 not knowing exactly where she was headed and not knowing when or if she would be able to return.

By morning, it was clear that a swift evacuation had been necessary. **She is grateful that her family escaped the Holiday Farm Fire that torched the buildings and businesses all around her home.** Her boyfriend made his way out of the river valley several hours after Jessica, and it was almost a week before she knew that her boss—whom she calls "Grandpa" because of their close relationship—had survived the wildfire.

"Everything is gone," she said about her community, which was just next to Blue River. "There is nothing left around my home."

Jessica had built a lovely lifestyle and support network for herself and her son along the scenic McKenzie River for 6 years. She managed airbnb properties and cleaned homes for renters. Her fifth-grade son attended McKenzie Elementary School, a close-knit learning environment that helped him with his disabilities.

"I am very sad to leave a place I wasn't ready to leave yet," she says wistfully.

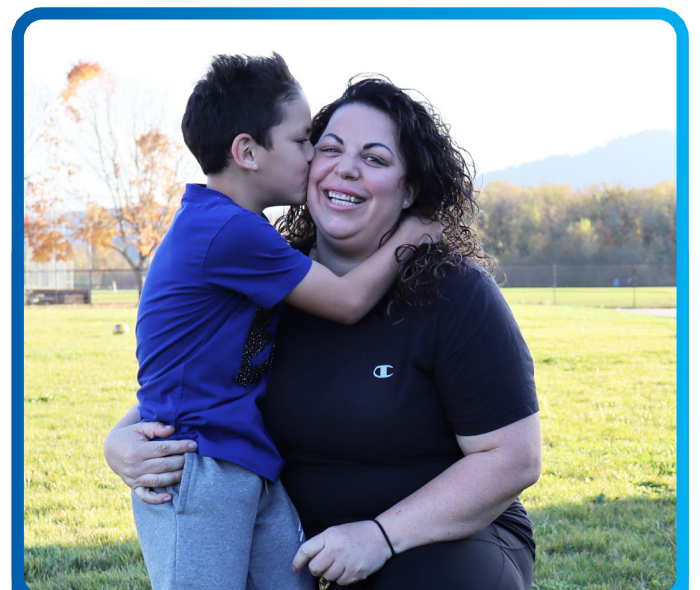
Jessica's way of making a living went up in flames when the fire scorched the landscape.

Smoke and ash damage make her home unlivable. Burned trees, destroyed businesses and rebuilding efforts make the region undesirable for tourists.

"There's nothing there for me now," she says. "The airbnbs caught on fire, the internet is out and the power lines are all gone. It is a massive effort to rebuild the area."

But Jessica, an optimist by nature, has turned to the future now. After living in a hotel for 7 weeks, she found a rental house and applied for jobs. She enrolled Rudy in the Eugene Family YMCA's youth program at Roosevelt Middle School, and the staff there are supporting his online learning through McKenzie Elementary School.

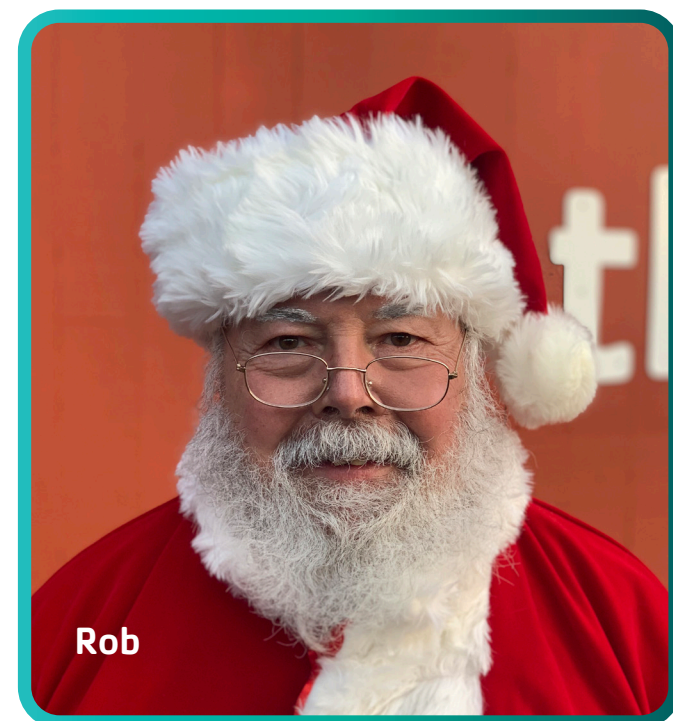
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Rudy and his mom survived a traumatic wildfire escape, but found security and community at the Y.

Your Y's Zoom Santas delighted children

For the first-time ever, your Y took on the mission of spreading Christmas cheer across the land. It was not a traditional program or activity, but **it was absolutely necessary in a year where children were told not to hug, not to share toys and not to visit Santa and tell him their Christmas wishes.**



Rob

Two Y Santas met with more than 45 children over Zoom—some in classrooms as far away as California and others in their homes just blocks from the Y. They navigated difficult questions about gift deliveries and authenticity. Lots of kids wanted to know if Santa was friends with Frosty the Snowman.

One 8-year-old, trying to determine if Santa was real, screamed when Y Santa Corey Anderson pulled his real beard—and it was clearly attached to his skin.

A young adult with autism told Santa of his love for jets and aircraft.

And one young girl's wish list included gifts for her pets: a mouse that ran in a circle for her cat and a stuffed animal for her dog.

"Spreading Christmas cheer during this difficult time was an absolute blessing," said Rob Pionke, who has embraced the role of Santa for Y preschoolers in years past. "Spending quality time with them and really listening to them brought joy to their lives. It was magical."

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For 10 families, Y Santa visits also meant that their kiddo's Christmas wishes were fulfilled by generous Y donors. Thank you for ensuring that every Y family could have a magnificent Christmas, despite the hardships created by COVID.



Corey

Family finds resources and hope at the Y

When 4J School District announced school would be online due to the global pandemic, Sara McDonald didn't know how she would manage to ensure her first-grader would engage in school while she worked and studied to be a registered nurse. At the time, the single mother of two young boys was working as a full-time medical assistant in a pediatric clinic and studying part-time through Lane Community College.

"This is what I need," she says about JP's enrollment in the Y's youth development program. **"I know every day that he went to his Zoom meetings and he turned in his homework. I can focus on family time because I am confident that he had a successful day."**

The switch from an afterschool program to full day created significant financial challenges as



well. But the Y's financial assistance and free lunch and snacks for the kids allows Sara to stay within her budget.

"I can just breathe because of the Y," she says. "I know I am going to be OK because of the Y."

Youth Development Leader Maritza Recognized Nationally

Y Multi-Site Coordinator Maritza Ruiz was honored as a **2021 National Afterschool Association's Next Generation of Afterschool Leader**, selected from a field of 125 as one of 45 national

noteworthy emerging leaders in the youth development field.

The National Afterschool Association recognizes individuals every year who are making contributions that have broad,

long-term impacts on programs and organizations. These honorees possess passion for their work, and offer leadership for other afterschool providers to follow suit.

Maritza has worked at the Y since 2014.

"Maritza shows up with optimism, hopefulness and a nurturing attitude every day," says Holly Kriz-Anderson, the Y's Vice President of Operations and Youth Development Director. **"Her ability to mentor staff, youth, families and the Eugene community is continually inspiring."**

The National Afterschool Association has committed to supporting Maritza's ongoing professional development because "our next generation of leaders are crucial to the sustainability, growth and success of this important profession."



Your Y made connection possible during a time of distance and isolation.

"It's vital that the Y work to address the loneliness and social isolation of our members," says CEO Brian Steffen. "The ongoing mental health crisis stemming from COVID-19 will only be solved when we find innovative ways for people to continue to feel part of a community, even while they stay home to prevent the spread of a deadly virus."

Mental Health America found that 71 percent of people surveyed turned to friends or family in times of stress--something far more difficult when we are isolating. And we know that isolation and loneliness results in higher rates of devastating health issues, including mortality, cognitive decline, cardiovascular disease and inflammation, according to the National Institutes of Health.

For its part, the Y hosted a holiday virtual bingo event in December that drew dozens of bingo players. Y staff invited members to socialize over Zoom for the holidays, and other members received phone calls from staff checking in on them.

In January, Y staff took a bright Youth Development bus to deliver Escape 2020 triathlon gear and 100-mile swim gear to participants who completed these challenges--it was a celebration of sorts, and a way to brighten the spirits of those missing their friends from the Y.

That same month, we launched our first 6-week Health Reset Challenge that participants could do on their own but with significant support from Y fitness experts.

The future brings new, innovative ways to stay connected with Y members as our community does its best to halt the spread of COVID-19 and combat the growing mental health crisis.

Feeling part of a community while physically separated from our friends and loved ones can be a big challenge. For Barbara Hascall, being a part of the Y family has made all the difference through a global pandemic.

"In the past, our class would get together and do weekend brunches or potlucks and it was great to spend time with each other outside the context of class," she says. "I've really made some good friends through that class. The instructors even made a phone list of all the people in the class so that we could stay in touch."

Barbara has been a Y member since 1977, and has been regularly attending the low-impact aerobics class since her retirement from teaching about 7 years ago. Little did she know when she entered the class for the first time, she would make friends to last a lifetime.

"The instructors truly help us form a community in really skillful ways," she says. "I appreciate how the instructors always greet us by name. As a teacher, I know how important it is to be known and have someone call you by name."

Barbara and her friends in the low-impact aerobics class have been able to adapt their classes to a virtual format on the Y's Virtual Hub since the pandemic began. They meet regularly over Zoom outside of the class to connect.

"Y staff share fun stories about their lives and families and we really get to know each other," she says. "No matter what you love to do, the Y has a community for you."

BARBARA HASCALL





FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

THIS IS Y.



February 2021

Final design
completed

March 2021

Building permit
application to
be submitted

April 2021

Updated
renderings
available

TBD

Groundbreaking
based on State
funding timing

Your Y is thrilled to announce that PIVOT Architecture completed the construction documents for the new Y just as significant contribu-

tions propel fundraising toward the \$42 million goal and the Y makes the third of four land payments.

The final design of the new Y includes a splash pad in the Aquatics Center to serve families with younger children; a circular track above the gym to provide a safe and stable indoor walking or jogging environment; a dedicated cycle studio; a teaching kitchen; and an intergenerational high-tech maker space with S.T.E.M. equipment. In looking ahead to the future, Y leaders wanted to ensure that the facility included seismic upgrades to support, shelter, serve and aid the community after a significant earthquake.

The new Y is even closer to reality thanks to Herb Merker and Marcy Hammock's recent \$100,000 gift and a \$100,000 contribution

secured by Andy Moore.

In addition, your Y made the third of four \$712,500 land payments in February to the 4J School District for the property.

Stay tuned: We will announce a groundbreaking date as soon as we have clarity from the state on the \$15 million bond sale timing, which we expect to know by the end of the legislative session in June.

Little Free Pantry helps those with food insecurity

It's clear that people need your Y's Little Free Pantry, **a shelter for canned and non-perishable food for the community.**

Since it was installed in November by Naomi Saenger, a South Eugene High School sophomore and longtime Y swimmer, the three shelves that hold food are regularly emptied.



"I've seen food insecurity in Eugene through my volunteer work," says Naomi, who volunteers with the nonprofit Burrito Brigade to feed those who are hungry. **"Accessible food is crucial. Seeing the pantry stocked with items from Y members is incredibly heartwarming and absolutely critical to those in south Eugene."**

Lane County has the second highest population of food insecure households out of all Oregon counties with 15.4 percent of residents not having access to adequate nutrition, according to a study by the Oregon Center for Public Policy, which conducted a 2016 study of food banks and pantries.

With food insecurity rising due to COVID-19, **your Y is taking advantage of the opportunity to serve our community in this new way.**

"Right now, the pantry is getting empty quick," Naomi says. "All items, including non-perishable foods and unopened menstrual products, are helpful to those who don't have easy access to the food banks north of downtown."

Find the Little Free Pantry between the pre-school fence and the newspaper boxes by the front entrance to your Y.

Note: Truly a Y project, the Little Free Pantry, in addition to being spearheaded by Naomi, was painted by Y member and local artist Sophie Navarro.

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Almost \$270,000 in Y financial assistance helped unhoused families, those displaced by wildfires, essential workers and frontline workers with their child care needs.

More than \$143,000 supported individuals seeking assistance with memberships or programs to meet their health and wellness needs—at a time when physical activity was so important to maintaining mental health.

Because of you, 2020 highlighted a year of resilience, innovation, expansion and remarkable support for families and individuals struggling through a global pandemic.

100 miles of swimming motivates members

2020 started off bright, with the hope that 40 brave swimmers would complete the Y's first swim challenge: 100 miles in 2020!

"I wanted to participate because I really needed a way to encourage myself to swim more," says Y member Ann Craig. "After shoulder surgery about 10 years ago, I haven't really returned to my swimming routine. I was working out every day in Y classes and the gym, but as I age, I know how important it is to continue swimming—keeping impact out of my joints and getting a cardio workout that doesn't pound my feet and knees."

Swimmers kept track of their laps in a binder by the pool and watched their progress on a giant poster in the Y's hallway.

"It is an ambitious goal," says Aquatics Director Sabrina Hershey Black. "These swimmers had to really commit to coming to the pool, counting their laps and logging their progress. They were prepared to modify their schedules based on vacations or catching a cold, but no one could have predicted pools closing for so long."

The Y closed its facility due to COVID-19 on March 13. Other area pools followed shortly thereafter. Even with facilities' reopening in the summer and fall, swimmers were required to reserve lap lanes and limit their time in the pool.

Dozens of them continued to keep track of their swims virtually, knowing that it not only helped with their physical fitness, but also their mental

health during the stress of a global pandemic.

"Swimming is very meditative," Ann says. "It helps me to slow down, focus and pay attention to the little things."



When I swim I think about the position of my hips, the sound of the water, the rhythm of the stroke and not the million other responsibilities I have in the world."



"The Y is my happy place and I am definitely one of those Y members who has a Y family—a group of women I have been working out with for several years. When I need to focus on doing something differently in my life, the Y is a great place to start because I'll always have support."

The 2020 100-mile swim challenge did not end how it was envisioned, but participants' enthusiasm means that it will return in years to come.

"I am so proud of these water-lovers who adapted to the world around them and found time, energy and the wherewithal to continue to swim," Sabrina says. "People turn to the Y for guidance and inspiration through difficult times, so it was fortuitous that we had launched the swim challenge before COVID-19."

Reset Challenge focuses on healthy habits

Knowing that physical health impacts mental health and that 2020 created additional stress and unhealthy habits, Health and Wellness director Kim Miller designed a 2021 Health Reset Challenge to support members as they refocused their energy on wellness. More than 115 people got a twice-weekly dose of encouragement and guidance about adding movement, reducing stress, eating mindfully and creating long-lasting habits.

"It's a great way to make some positive goals around being vibrant, healthy and alive," says

Mary Steinberg-Pichey, who used the challenge to focus on walking more and adding aerobic activities. "With COVID-19, motivation has been hard, so this challenge will help me put one foot in front of the other."



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"I was happy that we can still have some of the river—through his school—to take with us while relocating here in Eugene," she says. "I'm excited for the new adventure."

She credits the Y with unwavering support during this traumatic transition.

"I was really worried, but Rudy's been doing amazing," she says. **"I am just really impressed with how Y staff keep him on track in school and make sure he has a good time."** He is excited to go in the morning!"



Y staff worked extra hard to ensure Rudy feels welcome and settled since the fall has been so challenging for him.

"I am just really impressed with how Y staff keep him on track in school and make sure he has a good time."

"The child care program has definitely made life easier for me and Rudy," Jessica says. "It helps to be surrounded by caring people."



SPONSORING THE
EUGENE FAMILY YMCA

At your Y, Jack is part of something special



Katie and Jack* are a superstar mother-son duo.

Jack, 22, has a huge, bright smile, an excellent memory and an intense love for social interactions. His mom Katie is fiercely supportive of

her son and his abilities and is the best combination of positive and realistic. They are a dynamic team.

"We had a lot of specialists tell us what he wouldn't be able to do," says Katie, recalling Jack's childhood. "He has physical limitations and intellectual limitations but that is all they are: limitations."

Jack was diagnosed with an unspecified intellectual disability when he was a toddler. He learned to cope with seizures and overcome a speech impairment and low muscle tone.

Katie's support meant that he learned to talk, even though he didn't say his first words until he was 7. He learned to walk and build strength in his muscles, even though the low muscle tone meant he didn't walk until almost 19 months old. Cole learned to say his sister's name, despite specialists telling Molly he would not be able to enunciate difficult sounds.

"I was told, 'He may never be able to say her name properly,'" Katie recalls. "I would get upset and think, 'Don't tell me he is not going to walk around and say his sister's name!'"

Katie's determination and focus on what Jack could accomplish set the stage for a remarkable young adulthood. Jack continued to push himself and extend his abilities far beyond what was expected of him.

In addition to finding his place in school, Jack found a comfortable place to workout consistently at the Y. He built up his endurance on the treadmill and rowing machine from 12 minutes to 30 minutes. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, he came to the Y three times a week and rewarded his hard work with a soak in the hot tub.

In May 2020, Jack graduated from a local program that taught independent living skills and offered community vocational experiences. Graduation was in the midst of Oregon's closures due to COVID-19. For someone as social as Jack, not having the opportunity graduating in an in-person ceremony was anticlimactic.

"I'm a people person," he says, smiling.

It's true: He is joyful, interested in other people and excited to interact with others.

"One of the places he could come and feel part of the community is the Y," says Katie. "It's really important for him and it feels like he is part of something special."

Jack's godmother, Christina, says that Jack was often dismissed when out in the community.

"That doesn't happen at the Y because the Y has a membership culture that is safe, kind, warm and inviting," she says. "That's Jack--and these are his people."

*At the Eugene Family YMCA, we respect everyone, particularly the most vulnerable in our population. So while this story is true, their names have been changed to protect their privacy. Thank you for understanding.