

YMCA plans \$1.8M expansion

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Fargo-Moorhead YMCA leaders Friday announced a \$1.8 million expansion of the Schlossman Family Y-West branch.

YMCA executive director Paul Finstad, meanwhile, said the nonprofit organization's board of directors is already discussing the potential for a third YMCA facility that could be built in far southwest Fargo as soon as five years from now.

At least one local health club owner said the Y-West addition is yet another foray for the Fargo-Moorhead YMCA into adult fitness.

"They're out of control, especially when it comes to adult fitness," said Doug Duran, owner of the Sports Center at 3320 Westrac Dr. S.W. in Fargo. "The Y has great youth sports programs — I take my own kids to swimming lessons there — but I think they've come to the conclusion that adult fitness is where the money is."

Duran, who has 1,500 members, said he lost members two years ago when the Fargo-Moorhead YMCA put \$3.3 million into its downtown facility. That project included a large weight and cardio equipment center.

"Health and fitness has always been part of the YMCA mission, since we started here in 1886," said Finstad.

According to Finstad, the Fargo-Moorhead YMCA five years ago served 20,000 people. Last year, it served 40,000 and within five years it expects to serve a total of 60,000.

"We need a plan to accom modate that growth," Finstad said at a news conference at the Y-West branch, where plans for a 13,000-square-foot addition were unveiled.

He said a third YMCA would likely be 60,000 square feet and include an indoor pool.

The downtown YMCA has 120,000 square feet. The expanded Y-West will be 65,000 square feet in size.

Brian Hayer, president of the YMCA board of directors and vice president of Warner & Co. of Fargo, said the expansion is being financed through operating funds. The board took a 15-year loan on the project.

"The interest rate is pretty favorable and the timing is right," Finstad added. The YMCA, with an annual budget of \$7 million and 450 employees, is among the largest in the nation among communities of similar size, Finstad said.

Mayer said they anticipate an expanded Y-West facility will attract an additional 600 memberships, making it possible the loan could be retired early. The Fargo-Moorhead YMCA currently has 6,600 memberships, mostly family memberships. Members are drawn from the metro area as well as nearby communities such as Casselton, N.D., and Barnesville, Minn.

According to Finstad, about one-third of all YMCA visits are now at Y-West. The facility is surrounded by large corporate employers, including US Bank, Community First and Otter Tail Corp. Pepsi-Americas is bringing 200 employees into its facility under construction nearby.

Y-West, although it does not have a swimming pool, is already unique in that it houses a climbing wall and indoor skateboard and inline skating room.

"This is just a continuation of what we've been working on for a long time," Finstad said.

Olaf Anderson & Son of Fargo has been hired to construct the Y-West addition, with work beginning next month and completion by September.

The project includes a 13,000-square-foot addition on the east side of the 7-year-old facility as well as renovation of 6,000 square feet in its lower level.

Child-care space will be quadrupled. A new conference room will be available for public use. New aerobics rooms will be added. A 12,500-square-foot weight and cardio training center will rival the one at the downtown YMCA.

"It will almost mirror what we have downtown, without a running track," Finstad said. The facilities can be used by those 14 and older. Finstad said younger children also can use fitness equipment if they go through a training program at the YMCA.

The expansion also includes 65 additional parking spaces.

Kara Johnson, director of Y-West, said the additional child-care space is most welcome. The Fargo-Moorhead YMCA currently serves 1,200 children at seven sites. Services include all-day, afterschool and drop-off programs, the latter for parents who need day care while they work out. Readers can reach Forum reporter Gerry Gilmour at (701) 241-5560