

Pottstown, Phoenixville YMCAs announce merger

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POTTSTOWN – The boards of two area YMCAs have agreed to merge into one new association to be called the Freedom Valley YMCA.

The vote, which was unanimous among board members from both entities, was held at a meeting Tuesday night at Lakeside Inn in Limerick that was attended by about 150 members of the combined boards and staffs of the five YMCA branches involved in the merger.

The Freedom Valley YMCA will consist of five branches that will retain their identity in their local communities: Audubon YMCA, Phoenixville YMCA, Pottstown Family YMCA, Spring Valley Branch YMCA, and Upper Perkiomen Valley YMCA – as well as 65 outreach sites.

Effective Jan. 1, the Phoenixville Area YMCA and the Family YMCAs of Pottstown and the Upper Perkiomen Valley will be part of the new, expanded organization, which will be the third largest YMCA of the 79 in existence in Pennsylvania.

The goal of this merger, according to Jay R. Schaeffer, president and CEO of the Phoenixville Area YMCA, which began in 1952, was “not to become bigger, but to become better.”

Schaeffer will become president and CEO of the Freedom Valley YMCA, which will boast about 2,000 total employees and 35,000 members.

The board of directors for the Freedom Valley YMCA will be comprised of a total of 30 members from the Phoenix-

(See YMCA MERGER on A3)

ville Area YMCA and Family YMCAs of Pottstown and Upper Perkiomen Valley’s existing boards. No jobs will be lost due to the merger, he said.

“This is a very exciting time,” Schaeffer said Wednesday. “We are looking forward to the future. We plan to build on the traditions and histories of both YMCAs.”

The decision to merge had been in talks since January 2007. An ad hoc committee of volunteers and board members of both YMCAs researched the possibility of a merger and found that the benefits to both the members and their communities were myriad. Members of the facilities will retain their privileges, and may gain new privileges at additional branches, according to Schaeffer.

Both boards unanimously approved a resolution on Sept. 20, 2007, to form a merged YMCA, which was ratified by the vote Tuesday.

The coming year will “probably be a year of big projects being addressed,” said Jo Ann Short, president and CEO of the Family YMCAs of Pottstown & Upper Perkiomen Valley.

“That may include a roof, a boiler, or a new filter for a pool,” she said.

The merger allows for the Pottstown facility, which dates to 1970, to proceed with infrastructure improvements as well as the purchase of new equipment, according to Short. The Pottstown Family YMCA has been a presence in the community since 1880.

“We’ve been growing, and our revenue base is getting stronger, but financially our hands were tied (before the merger),” Short said. “Getting together allows our staff resources to be shared. We feel like there’s a broader foundation to kick off a new campaign for improvements.”

At the Pottstown facility, “in the last five years we’ve been running very, very lean” on staff, Short said. With the merger, the staff and members of the Pottstown facility will immediately benefit from access to the Phoenixville YMCA’s marketing, development and



accounting departments, she said.

Because the Phoenixville Area **YMCA** and Family YMCAs of Pottstown and Upper Perkiomen Valley have some of the same programs, such as summer camps and aquatics classes, some of those things may be merged as well, according to Short.

"We both do the same things, so the redundancies just don't make sense anymore," said Short, who will become a vice president in the Freedom Valley YMCA.

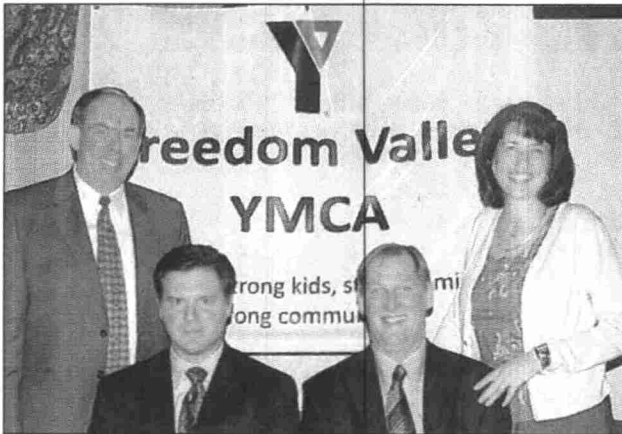
The two YMCAs have been working on different projects together throughout the year, according to Jo Ann Short, president and CEO of the Family YMCAs of Pottstown and Upper Perkiomen Valley. These include a 4,700-square-foot expansion of the Phoenixville branch and the creation of an annex of the Upper Perk facility in a Route 663

shopping center, set to open Jan. 4. Upcoming projects include a new \$10 million facility in Upper Perk, which is now in the planning stages.

Overall benefits of the merger, according to Schaeffer, include strengthened community leadership, effective centralized management, increased cost effectiveness, higher quality programs and facilities, increased staff and volunteer resources, enhanced community presence, continued strong local input and synergy of staff resourcing and staff upward mobility.

The visible changes that will result from the merger will be subtle, according to Schaeffer.

"The community may not even notice it. They'll still identify with their local Y," he said. "But hopefully they'll see improvements."



Jay R. Schaeffer, Kevin S. Christman, James A. Konnick and Jo Ann Short pose in front of the new Freedom Valley YMCA banner.

Photo courtesy of the Phoenixville Area YMCA

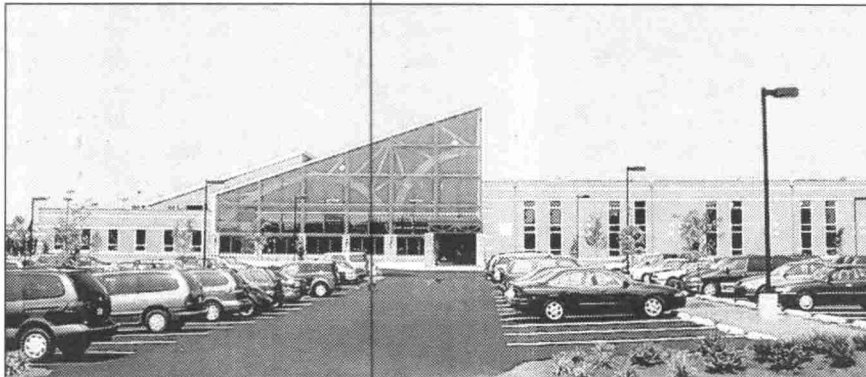


Photo courtesy of Phoenixville Area YMCA

The Spring Valley branch of Phoenixville Area YMCA is one of five facilities that will become the Freedom Valley YMCA as of January 1.

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