

FEATURES

Community gives back as YMCA of Honolulu celebrates 150 years

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YMCA of Honolulu celebrates 150th year



Video by Bruce Asato / basato@staradvertiser.com

The YMCA of Honolulu celebrates its 150th anniversary this year.

It was a sunny, windy Tuesday in early March. At Honolulu's Nuuanu YMCA, morning preschool had just let out, and two little boys and a girl in a yellow dress ran through the airy central courtyard, crossing paths with limber kupuna leaving exercise class.

Generations intersected throughout the building. In a day-lit studio, a class of 20- to 70-somethings did aerobics with hand weights. In a fitness room, people of college through retirement age worked out on machines, while in an adjacent, glass-walled nursery, Y staffers baby-sat infants and toddlers; a mom on a treadmill could check on her child with a glance.

Everyone looked focused, relaxed and very much at home. Asked what she liked about the Y, “I feel very comfortable here,” said Florani Camacho, 19, a Kalihi native who recently joined the Y to stay in shape after completing her National Guard basic training. “You get to do what you want to do without anyone - judging,” Camacho said, praising the encouraging staff and the wide selection of activities.

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A smiling Blaise Desaubies sat at a courtyard with his daughter Claudia, 3, whom he had picked up from preschool and was eating a large cookie. “We enjoy Claudia’s multicultural class — she understands different ethnicities,” he said, noting that he and his wife like being part of the Y’s family-friendly community. “I have not experienced that sense of community otherwise than here,” said the father of three, an American who was raised in France. Both he and his wife serve in the U.S. military; the family has been posted in five countries.

The multifaceted cultural, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as widespread age range, of its 100,000 yearly users are the pride of the YMCA of Honolulu, which celebrates its 150th anniversary this year, said Michael Broderick, the nonprofit association’s CEO and president.

YMCA OF HONOLULU BRANCHES

531-9622, ymcahonolulu.org

- >> **Atherton:** 1810 University Ave.; 946-0253
- >> **Camp H.R. Erdman:** 669-385 Farrington Highway, Waialua; 637-4615
- >> **Central:** 401 Atkinson Drive; 941-3344
- >> **Kaimuki-Waialae:** 4835 Kilauea Ave.; 737-5544
- >> **Kalihi:** 1335 Kalihi St.; 848-2494
- >> **Leeward:** 94-440 Mokuola St., Waipahu; 671-6495
- >> **Mililani:** 95-1190 Hikikaulia St., Mililani; 625-1040
- >> **Nuuanu:** 1441 Pali Highway; 536-3556
- >> **Windward:** 1200 Kailua Road, Kailua; 261-0808
- >> **Waianae Youth Center:** 86-071 Leihoku St., Waianae; 969-2287

“As early as 1918, the Nuuanu Y was hailed as one of the most ethnically diverse YMCAs in the U.S.,” Broderick said, “and I’m absolutely confident that in year 2019 our nine Y’s across the island are the most ethnically diverse across the nation.”

Helping young people grow into healthy, supportive community members was the founding purpose of the organization, and members such as Nainoa Heaston, 25, fulfill that mission by giving back in turn. Like many island youngsters, Heaston took summer day camps at the Nuuanu Y during

elementary. In high school he participated in the Kaimuki Y's teen program. "I was surrounded by these caring people at the Y, and the feeling you get when someone helps you, that's what I wanted to contribute," Heaston said.

As an undergrad at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Heaston worked part time at the on-campus Atherton Y, doing college-prep outreach with high school students who are now graduating from college. One of his happiest memories is leading a volunteer trip to Molokai "and teaching college students to be servants by working in loi, restoring boardwalk in the nature preserves, planting native plants. It was just so cool to help students learn who they are," said Heaston, who went on to earn a Master of Science degree in social work from UH-Manoa. Just promoted to social services director of a nursing facility in Kalihi, he continues to volunteer as well as work out at the Y.



This month, to commemorate its sesquicentennial, the YMCA of Honolulu is going public with a capital campaign to position the continuation of its threefold mission of fostering healthy living, youth development and social responsibility into the future.

The capital campaign, Broderick explained, seeks support above and beyond the Y's annual operating budget, which was \$28.2 million in 2018, of which approximately 88 percent went directly for operating programs and more than \$1 million to funding outreach and community programs and providing financial assistance for those who couldn't otherwise afford memberships and youth programs. To date, the campaign has reached 52 percent of its \$15 million goal, with money allocated to three projects:

>> Renovating the cabins at Camp Erdman in Mokuleia, where 15,000 children and their families enjoy outdoor experiences each year.

>> Adding a permanent building with meeting rooms and basketball courts at the YMCA Waianae Youth Center, which since 2003 has operated out of a trailer, helping teens stop substance abuse.

>> Reconfiguring the Nuuanu Y physical space to accommodate the needs of a growing and changing urban population.

Broderick, 62, a former Honolulu Family Court judge, said the programs serving lower-income residents, particularly at-risk youth, are dear to his heart. "I wanted to prevent people from ending up in places like Family Court. I saw so much suffering," he said. "Because we have so many youth leadership and drug-treatment programs (a total of 25 islandwide), the Y has helped keep kids out of detention."

SAVE THE DATES

Camp Erdman Family Day

10 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday

Camp tours, kids' activities and a historic camp exhibit, free admission. 69-385 Farrington Highway, Waialua

150th Anniversary Community Birthday Celebration

9 a.m.-1 p.m. April 27

Special activities and historic exhibits, free admission. At six YMCA of Honolulu branches: Kaimuki-Waiālae, Kalihi, Leeward, Mililani, Nuuanu and Windward

150th anniversary Ho'olaulea dinner

5-9 p.m. Nov. 9

Ko'olau Ballrooms and Conference Center

For more information, go to ymcahonolulu.org.

The Nuuanu Y is a hub, Broderick said, in a downtown community with “very low socioeconomic populations” including new immigrants from China and the South Pacific islands, and homeless children, for whom the Y conducts summer learning programs in partnership with neighboring Central Middle School. “Our capital campaign is intended to support those who need our help the most.”

Meanwhile, Y branches islandwide keep expanding and improving their health and fitness offerings, said Michael Doss, vice president and COO, who oversees physical wellness programs and maintenance of exercise equipment and works out almost every day at the Nuuanu Y. “People know me, so they’re not shy about coming up and saying treadmill 31 is acting up,” he said. He makes such spot fixes while ensuring that new strength/resistance and cardio equipment is rotated in every three years.

Doss, 58, also oversees the Y’s 9-year-old, evidence-based chronic disease prevention program, in which it partners with and collects data for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; its growing diabetes prevention program is covered by Medicare and many local insurers and employers. Next on the list is high blood pressure.

“Almost every day, somebody tells me a story about how the Y changed their life,” said Broderick, who also works out at the Y. What’s crucial, he said, is to get the message out to an ever-changing population that the Y is there to help. Attesting to good institutional design, every generation produces new champions like Heaston who spread the word.