

*NSYMCA guest column for Northbrook Tower's 2014 in Review*

*By Howard Schultz, Executive Director/CEO, North Suburban YMCA*

In 2014, the North Suburban YMCA continued its mission to promote values that build strong families and the health of each individual's spirit, mind, and body in an inclusive, welcoming environment. Offering programs for all ages, and working with community partners and generous donors, we filled the year with exciting special events, innovative programs, and improvements to our Northbrook facility.

Our Y introduced a number of new programs in 2014, and made popular existing programs more widely available. Yoga was added to the expanding list of free fitness classes offered to Y members, joining cycle, Zumba, and Pilates, and a new punch-card system made scheduling small group training more flexible. With generous support from Dick's Sporting Goods, we launched our new Flying Turtles youth swim team that complements our famed Aquatics instruction. We've also unveiled new activities for older adults, including the newest adult athletic game – Pickleball. We are also launching a new website at the end of December that will make it easier to find Y services for all ages.

One of the core elements of our Y is our commitment to keeping programs affordable for all, including families in financial need. The Strong Kids Fund provides scholarships that make Y programs accessible to all our neighbors, allowing kids to go to camp, parents to rely on afterschool care, and seniors to stay active and socially engaged in our community. The 2014 Strong Kids Fundraising Dinner put us over the \$1.75 million mark for funds raised since 2007, and we thank all our donors who make such a difference in the lives of the one-out-of-five Y participants receiving assistance. Mark your calendars for our 2015 Strong Kids Fundraiser at Pinstripes on February 26 -- it's going to be spectacular!

A feature of NSYMCA services are community-wide events that entertain and inspire. Our Spooktacular Halloween Party, Family Fun Day, Summer Movie Nights, and Community Vendor Market Day have all become highly anticipated by the community.

In partnership with the Northbrook Community Relations Commission, we hosted the Taste of Asia Festival and the Black History Month symposium. We supported outside organizations with events like the Prom Fashion Show that benefitted NCDAA, the Moves Like Tori fundraiser for the Tori Wilensky Foundation, and the annual visit of the Push America Journey of Hope bike team that raises awareness for children with special needs.

Our programs for individuals with special needs continued to grow and provide valuable opportunities to maximize each person's potential. Our trained staff worked closely with NSSED, Exercise Connection, Special Olympics, and other agencies to provide unique fitness, sports, art, and dance classes in our H.A.W.K.S. ("Helping All Wonderful Kids Succeed") program. The Y also worked with Total Link2 Community, Keshet, and NSSED to provide an opportunity to create jobs within a workforce that now includes nine individuals with disabilities.

Programs have been enhanced by improvements and additions to our facility. With the support of the Buehler Family Foundation and UPS, the new Youth and Family Wellness Center opened which is now home to a variety of fitness, childhood obesity prevention, and mind-body classes. The Northbrook Civic Foundation donated to the new X-Zone Climbing Wall. We also undertook significant upgrades to our HVAC system that will help our building stay comfortable and energy-efficient.

We have a variety of fresh initiatives starting in early 2015, including an all-new Member Loyalty Incentive Program, a “Lose to Win” 12-week fitness challenge, and new classes beginning with the start of our Winter Session on January 5. It’s an exciting time to be part of our growing, evolving Y community! I hope you’ll take this opportunity to become more involved with our efforts as a member, a donor, or a volunteer. To learn more, visit our newly re-designed website launching on December 28 at [www.nsymca.org](http://www.nsymca.org), or contact me directly at [hschultz@nsymca.org](mailto:hschultz@nsymca.org).