



# CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE

METROPOLITAN YMCA OF THE ORANGES  
WINTER 2026

## A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO: SHAPING THE FUTURE OF THE YMCA TOGETHER

As we look ahead to the coming year, I'm excited about what's possible for our YMCA and the communities we serve. Every day, I see the incredible impact of generosity: opening doors for children, families, and seniors to learn, grow, and thrive.

This year, philanthropy will help us take bold steps forward.

Two major initiatives will expand our impact:

- Our Annual Support Campaign ensures that no one is turned away from the Y because of financial barriers. Your gifts make programs like child care, swim lessons, summer camp, and wellness resources accessible to all.
- The West Essex YMCA Capital Campaign is about building for the future. We're creating a modern, welcoming facility with state-of-the-art fitness spaces, an expanded aquatics center, and vibrant community gathering spaces designed to serve generations to come.

As you explore this inaugural issue of [Champions for Change](#), you'll see how our Y is making a difference through innovative programs, new partnerships, and critical donor support. These efforts reflect our commitment to strengthening community—and they depend on you. Whether you choose to give, volunteer, or share the Y's story, your involvement matters. Together, we can make this a year of transformation.

Thank you for believing in the power of the YMCA and championing our cause. With your support, our future is limitless.

Yours in service,

Richard K. Gorab  
President and CEO



## SPORTING CLAYS EVENT RAISES \$66K FOR MENTAL HEALTH

The Metro Y celebrated a successful second annual Sporting Clays fundraiser on Oct. 27 at the iconic Hudson Farm Club in Andover, raising a net total of \$66,000 to expand mental health programs across the Metro Y.

The event brought together 46 participants for a day of outdoor fun and networking. Guests enjoyed a welcome luncheon, ceremonial cannon firing, shooting lessons, and a sporting clays tournament, followed by an elegant cocktail reception with dinner and live auction.

### Impact Beyond Event

Funds will support mental health initiatives across all six Metro Y branches, including:

- **Staff training:** To date, 400+ staff have earned certifications in Mental Health First Aid, Nurtured Heart Approach®, or QPR Suicide Prevention.
- **Youth development:** Three social-emotional learning curricula were introduced in child care programs serving 3,000 youth.
- **Community programs:** We've already hosted 40+ parent workshops and responded to 400+ behavior support requests this year.



### Thank You to Our Sponsors

This event would not have been possible without the support of our incredible sponsors: Vericon Construction, S2C Contracting, MTP, Lakeside Construction Inc., RoNetco Supermarkets, R&R Construction Co., International Longshoreman's Association, Local 1, The Dale Group Insurance and Bonds, Valley Bank, Peapack Private Bank & Trust, Pennant Park, Sameer Malthotra, Donald J. Parks Inc., Jeff London, HQW Architects, Walkill Group and Ted Foug.

## HOW SOUTH MOUNTAIN YMCA IS MAKING BASKETBALL INCLUSIVE FOR ALL KIDS

South Mountain YMCA is launching a new program to help children with diverse abilities learn basketball in ways that work best for them.

Buddy Ball is a fun and supportive basketball class designed for neurodiverse children. It offers a safe and welcoming space where kids can enjoy the game at their own pace. Through engaging activities, adapted drills, and small-group instruction, kids build basic basketball skills like dribbling, passing, shooting, and movement. Along the way, they also develop confidence, coordination, and social connections.

### How the Program Works

Each player is paired one-on-one with a volunteer “buddy” who supports them during class. Together, they practice skills and celebrate effort, friendship, and encouragement. The program is led by the Y’s veteran basketball coach, “Coach Fred,” who brings energy and joy to every session.

The program came about through a partnership between SOMA Basketball and the Y. Buddy Ball was piloted over the summer and quickly filled. It’s now offered as a year-round program from September through June. YMCA members and community members are welcome to join. The program is divided into two age groups: 5-12 and 13-18. Classes are held on Thursdays at the Y in Maplewood.

### Community Impact

“The special part about this program is that it is right in the community. Many of the kids attend school out of the school district so being able to attend an activity in the community provides that connection to where they live,” said Nicole Josey, Program Coordinator.

For Josey, the program is also personal - her son, who has autism, is a participant. She says Buddy Ball has made a big difference in Aiden’s confidence.

“My son now walks around with a basketball, and he’s excited about Thursdays because he knows he has class. He just had his first birthday party ever this year and most of the kids who attended his party also attend Buddy Ball. This program has given him an outlet and has helped him make friends,” she said.

Katie Rumley said Buddy Ball has given her 14-year-old son Sean a place where he can grow, challenge himself, and connect with friends.



“It’s also been a wonderful environment for parents to be able to connect, watch our kids have fun together, and not have to stress because our kids are well supported,” said Rumley.

### Volunteer Opportunities

SOMA Basketball now leads buddy recruitment and onboarding. Volunteers model basketball skills, provide clear instructions, demonstrate activities, and ensure all participants feel comfortable and included.

Volunteer and SOMA Basketball Boosters member Yoav Hagler said:

“It has been a privilege to be part of a program at its inception that creates such a joyful and inclusive space for kids...”

“It has been a privilege to be part of a program at its inception that creates such a joyful and inclusive space for kids. Watching the connections grow between players and their buddies through basketball has been an awesome experience. I’m grateful to help support something that makes our community stronger.”

Volunteers ages 13 and older are needed to support participants. For more information or to volunteer, contact Josey at [njosey@metroymcas.org](mailto:njosey@metroymcas.org).

### Other Sports and Inclusive Programs at the South Mountain YMCA

South Mountain YMCA offers a variety of sports programs for youth, including basketball classes for all ages, the Ducks Basketball League, Travel Basketball, and Her Time to Play, a program for girls in partnership with the WNBA and Jr. NBA.

The Y is also expanding its inclusive offerings. New programs like Inclusive Baking and Inclusive Art Classes are launching and last spring, the Y hosted an Inclusive Egg Hunt.

Additionally, Josey is coordinating a new free program for middle and high school students called Future Makers. This entrepreneurial initiative gives youth hands-on experience and mentorship to help them turn ideas into real businesses.



Sponsor this or another program at the Y.



## WELLNESS PROGRAM HELPS VETERANS THRIVE

Thanks to generous donor contributions, the Sussex County and West Essex YMCAs are proud to continue offering the **Veterans Pathway Program**, a free initiative that promotes health, wellness, and community for those who have served our country.

Open to active military, military veterans, and/or a spouse or partner, the free 12-week program provides participants access to health and wellness opportunities, as well as meaningful social connections with those who share the bond of military service.

### Each participant receives:

- Free access to the Y360 virtual wellness platform
- A Family Membership during the program
- An additional 6-month adult membership upon completion

The programs meet for evening and daytime sessions at both West Essex and Sussex County Ys.



### Impact in action:

The inaugural program session last spring saw 45 participants ranging in age from 30 to 98. Another 22 participants were enrolled in the second session this past fall.

Participants have shared how the program has helped them build discipline, develop healthy habits, and feel stronger both physically and mentally. One veteran, Charles Aptowitz, said: "I have found it to be very motivational. Staff have been very helpful in explaining all the different exercises and giving me the motivation to want to do it. I feel like all of these things, if not curing anything, certainly help you feel a lot better."

Participants also gave back through service projects, from creating gardens at the Y to reading to children in our early childhood programs.



The Veterans Wellness Initiative began in 2015 at the Doylestown branch of the YMCA of Bucks and Hunterdon Counties. Since then, the free, donor-supported Pathway program has expanded to other NJ branches, serving over 650 veterans and their families.

**"Staff have been very helpful in explaining all the different exercises and giving me the motivation to want to do it."**

### You can make an even greater impact:

Programs like Veterans Wellness are possible because of donor support. There are more opportunities to fund free, life-changing programs that strengthen community and transform lives. Contact us to learn about opportunities for creating spaces where everyone can thrive.

To learn about the Veterans Wellness program or share this opportunity with a veteran, visit [metroymcas.org/veterans](http://metroymcas.org/veterans) or call 973-758-9039.



## PASSING IT ON: TRUDY ATKINS' LEGACY OF GENEROSITY

For Trudy Atkins, "passing it on" is more than a saying—it's a way of life. As a lifelong educator, she has seen how generosity opens doors and changes lives. For Trudy, giving is deeply personal.

Her connection to Fairview Lake YMCA Camps began years ago, accompanying East Brunswick 6th graders on group trips. Watching hundreds of students discover courage and confidence on the lake and trails made Fairview a place she loved – a place that transformed children and renewed her spirit.

Trudy's brother, Tommy, a Navy pilot and Junior ROTC instructor, also led a life of honor and service, spending decades shaping young leaders and serving our country. After his wife died, Trudy brought Tommy to Fairview Lake to experience the same healing and tranquility she understood was rooted in both the people of Fairview and its majestic nature. When Tommy passed, Trudy honored him with a memorial gift to renovate Oak Cabin—chosen for its place at the crossroads where campers set off on new adventures—a tribute to his life, his strength, and their shared connection to Fairview.

Trudy's message is clear: "If you've experienced generosity, then when you can, you need to participate." Her gift honors Tommy and inspires others to give, because every contribution creates lasting impact.

"If you've experienced generosity, then when you can, you need to participate."



## THIS IMPACT IS ONLY POSSIBLE THANKS TO OUR GENEROUS SUPPORTERS. THANK YOU!

THE METROPOLITAN  
YMCA OF THE ORANGES

Total funds  
distributed in 2025

**\$2,403,907**



EARLY CHILDCARE

**\$411,975**  
84 Awardees



SCHOOLAGE CHILDCARE

**\$446,530**  
463 Awardees



MEMBERSHIP & ACTIVITIES

**\$536,403**  
1,569 Awardees



AQUATICS

**\$189,654**  
561 Awardees



CAMP

**\$819,345**  
1,392 Awardees

## VOICES OF THE Y

Every day, the YMCA makes a difference in the lives of families and individuals in our community. Here is one of their stories:

"The YMCA has become home for our family through the aftercare program, summer camp, not to mention the Racers swim team and gym for our family. The YMCA provides the balance in our lives."

These voices remind us why your support matters. Together, we make it possible for families to thrive, children to learn and grow, and individuals to feel connected and supported.

**Want to help more families like these?**

Learn about giving opportunities at [metroymcas.org/give](https://metroymcas.org/give) or our Financial Assistance program at [metroymcas.org/fa](https://metroymcas.org/fa).

## JOIN US FOR...

### Charge Ahead: Annual Support Campaign

At the Y, generosity doesn't just add up—it multiplies. Our 2026 Annual Support Campaign, Charge Ahead / Supercharged, celebrates the power of donors, volunteers, and neighbors coming together to fuel life-changing programs.

#### Branch kickoff events:

Fairview Lake YMCA Camps – February 1  
at Fairview Lake YMCA Camps

West Essex YMCA – February 4, 6–8:30pm  
at Hanover Manor

East Orange YMCA – February 5, 6pm  
at East Orange YMCA

Sussex County YMCA – February 5  
at Sussex County YMCA Gymnasium

Bergen County YMCA, New Milford Program Center –  
February 6, 7pm at New Milford YMCA Program Center

South Mountain YMCA – February 7  
at First Presbyterian & Trinity Church

### Sussex Y Golf Outing – Ballyowen Golf Club Wednesday, May 20, 2026

Return to the breathtaking Ballyowen Golf Club for the Sussex County YMCA Golf Outing. With sweeping mountain views and scenic fairways, it's the perfect setting for a day of golf, camaraderie, and impact.

### South Mountain YMCA Duck Race Memorial Day 2026

Cheer on a flock of racing ducks at one of our most beloved traditions—the South Mountain YMCA Duck Race in Memorial Park. Sponsor a duck, root for your favorites, and compete for fun prizes while supporting community programs.

### Golf Outing – Montclair Golf Club Monday, September 14, 2026

Hit the legendary fairways of Montclair Golf Club at our 32nd Annual Golf Outing. Enjoy a full round of golf, Hole-in-One challenges, on-course games, and a lively cocktail reception at sunset—all in support of YMCA programs that strengthen our communities.

### Sporting Clays – Hudson Farm Club Monday, October 26, 2026

Join us at the renowned Hudson Farm Club for our 3rd Annual Sporting Clays Event. This fast-growing tradition brings together supporters for an unforgettable day at one of New Jersey's premier shooting venues.

### Greater Bergen County Y Sports Awards Dinner Tuesday before Thanksgiving, 2026

Celebrate 61 years of athletic excellence at the Greater Bergen County Sports Awards Dinner. Athletes, coaches, families, and fans come together to honor standout performances from across Bergen County.

Interested in our signature events?  
Scan the QR code to get updates.



## EAST ORANGE PARTNERSHIP SUPPORTS YOUTH AND TEENS AT THE Y



The East Orange YMCA proudly celebrates its partnership with Triangle Equities, co-developer of The Crossings at Brick Church Station. A steadfast supporter of the Y's mission to strengthen community and provide access to wellness, Triangle Equities has funded program enrollment for 200 children in both 2024 and 2025 and supported a vibrant mural on the Y's exterior.

### YMCA Teen Mural Project: A Story of Community and Belonging

Over three weeks, East Orange Y teens collaborated with a professional muralist to create a piece reflecting love, peace, and safe spaces. Through brainstorming, design, and painting, teens shared experiences and discovered the Y as their first true safe space — a place to belong. The finished mural stands as a lasting symbol of their voices, creativity, and connection. As one teen said, "Now everyone who sees this mural will know this is where love and peace live."

## METRO Y WELCOMES NEW CDO

The Metro Y recently named Deborah "Deb" Kessler as its new Chief Development Officer. She will work closely with the Y's leadership teams to develop and spearhead annual fundraising initiatives, capital campaigns and strategies that advance the YMCA's mission of youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility.



"The YMCA has shaped my personal journey, and I'm honored to serve in a role where I can give back," said Kessler. "I'm committed to supporting the Y's vital work and inviting the community to play an active role in shaping its future."

Kessler joined the Y on Oct. 6, bringing over a decade of leadership in higher education advancement at the University of Arizona, where she played an integral role in a \$3 billion fundraising campaign supporting capital projects, research, and student success. Her leadership was instrumental in securing landmark gifts, including the construction of cutting-edge facilities. As Assistant Vice President for Principal Giving and Regional Development, she led national fundraising efforts and her strategic vision continues to influence the university's philanthropic outreach today.

In announcing her hiring, Metro YMCAs President and CEO Richard K. Gorab said: "Deb brings a wealth of experience and a proven track record in philanthropy, strategic development, and organizational growth. Her leadership and vision will be instrumental as we continue to expand our culture of philanthropy and achieve new milestones."



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Livingston, NJ 07039  
973 758 9622  
[metroymcas.org](http://metroymcas.org)

## METROPOLITAN YMCA OF THE ORANGES ACCREDITATIONS



### MISSION STATEMENT

Stengthen community through youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility.

**METROPOLITAN YMCA OF THE ORANGES**  
Association Services  
304 South Livingston Avenue  
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[metroymcas.org](http://metroymcas.org)  
P 973 758 9622

**EAST ORANGE YMCA**  
100 North Arlington Avenue  
East Orange, NJ 07017  
P 973 673 5588

**FAIRVIEW LAKE YMCA CAMPS**  
1035 Fairview Lake Road  
Newton, NJ 07860  
[fairviewlakeymca.org](http://fairviewlakeymca.org)  
P 973 383 9282

**BERGEN COUNTY YMCA-NEW MILFORD PROGRAM CENTER**  
1092 Carnation Drive  
New Milford, NJ 07646  
P 973 758 9039

**SOUTH MOUNTAIN YMCA**  
13 Jefferson Avenue  
Maplewood, NJ 07040  
P 973 762 4145

**SUSSEX COUNTY YMCA**  
15 Wits End Road  
Hardyston, NJ 07419  
P 973 209 9622

**SUSSEX COUNTY YMCA PICKLEBALL CENTER**  
11 Millpond Drive  
Lafayette, NJ 07848  
[ypickleballcenter.org](http://ypickleballcenter.org)  
973-535-2651

**WEST ESSEX YMCA**  
321 S. Livingston Avenue  
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P 973 992 7500