

New Start for the Y

By Doris Meneses | Posted: Friday, April 20, 2018 12:00 am

Sue Loyzelle takes the reins at the YMCA

If you drive on US 1 headed north and happen to sit at the light with your windows open, the birds chirp and you hear other voices shouting commands such as, “On your mark...get set...go!” “Kick harder!” “Drop and give me 20.” “Faster...go faster.” Mary had a little lamb... little lamb.”

Look to your right and you will see two signs flashing...”Come try our heated pool.” “Homeschool PE Classes available.” You also see a parking lot filled with vehicles as well as people walking, pushing strollers, running and exercising.

This is the Homestead branch of the YMCA and the sounds heard originate from the likes of Ishmael Azimulla who instructs the swim team, Matt Clyne’s voice bellowing to the Boot Camp filled with youngsters or children ages 1 to 5 who attend the Pre-K Program run by the YMCA.

As reported back in a 2009 article in the South Dade News Leader, the building that houses the YMCA was built after Hurricane Andrew in 1994 through FEMA money, insurance money and a donation of which many residents are unaware. According to an unnamed source, Mrs. Richard “Dick” Jacobs, the wife of one of the owners of the Cleveland Indians was very upset that the Indians walked away from their promise to bring spring training to the City of Homestead as she loved the area. To help, Adeline Jacobs wrote a check for a million dollars to the City. The YMCA is eased from the City of Homestead.

Directors of the YMCA in Homestead have come and gone since its inception, many like a revolving door. In January of this year, Sue Loyzelle took the reins for the Homestead Y and plans to change that scenario. She stated, “I wanted to get back to the people. The opportunity arose and I know the community and my heart is in Homestead.” Loyzelle’s title is Executive Director of Homestead and Key Largo and she is no stranger to Homestead. From 1988 to 1996 she started as the Program Director and then became Executive Director for the Y in Homestead. Loyzelle explained, “We didn’t have this beautiful facility then. I was here when they built this Y and for about a year after it opened and then I went to the corporate office where I wrote grants for the Y.

In 2009, the South Dade News Leader also brought to light the many issues with the maintenance of the building with items such as the air conditioning units, the pool’s filtration motor and chlorination to name a few. In the past, the pool’s heater was also an issue which closed the pools for months during the year.

The condition of the locker rooms has continually been an issue as they were built without air conditioning. Although ignored for years, Ms. Loyzelle has taken notice. “There is a grant for locker room renovations and I’d like to write one for air conditioning as well.” said Loyzelle.

“My long-term vision is to bring this back to what it once was. A lot of improvements have been made since I’ve been here and before but more has to be done.” She stated. “Hurricane Irma did not do the YMCA any favors.” Looking around, it is clearly noticed that the winds ripped down spouting, did roof damage, destroyed playgrounds and fencing and just wreaked havoc wherever it touched the building.



Sue Loyzelle (2nd from left) with Lisa Jackson and her grandkids.

“I also would like to make the outside areas that are now just covered in mulch usable and friendly so people can sit and enjoy.” Loyzelle explained as she showed one area where she moved tables so members could sit and converse. Loyzelle has ideas in her head.

“I don’t know how to do it but I’m thinking of doing something like the Great Landscaping Challenge at the Y as we have a lot of wonderful landscapers in the area and maybe I can come up with a creative way for them to pitch in.” she mused. “If we showcase their work, maybe members will want to use their companies for their homes. I don’t know how to get it going but I’m thinking. It all cost money so I have to continue to search for funds or be creative to get things done. I want our Y to be self-supporting.”

As Loyzelle walks through the Pre-K Center, she addresses students by name and asks them about their day. Grandmother Lisa Jackson arrives with her grandchildren Aaron, 6, and Aiana, 7, to pick up two more of her grandchildren, Brenton, 2, and Benjamin, 4. Jackson gave hugs and smiled, “These children love it here and we love having them here.” Currently there are 127 children at the center and a grant allows all the children in the pre-school to receive free swimming lessons during the day while in school.

The Swim for Jenny Program is also managed by the YMCA. Funds are raised to offer free or subsidized swimming lessons to children and adults. “We just did lessons during spring break and It was cool to see entire families come in to learn.” stated Sue. “We had over 200 in the program. May 3rd is our big fundraiser for the program and the funds raised there will help to provide swimming lessons to the public.”

“Besides the facility improvements, I need to drive membership and make people feel at home. What pockets are we missing? We are trying to work with the Chapman Partnership with camps. I come from a world that everything does not have to happen within these walls. What is out there and how can we help is the question.” explained Loyzelle.

Loyzelle is trying to get the word out about what the Homestead YMCA can offer. “This coming Saturday, April 21st, we have Healthy Kids Day and anyone can attend. Parents can sign their children up for one of the many summer camps this Saturday and save big as the Camp Registration Fee is being waived only on this day. That’s a big savings! That is \$50 per child.” she added.

Whether it is hip-hop, teen boot camp or Y fit for kids to chair yoga, water aerobics, spin classes or Zumba for adults, the Y is offering a little of everything for everyone. Pamphlets are available in the lobby.

Loyzelle summarized, “I just want to be with the people and make them feel welcome.” It seems that the Homestead YMCA may finally have the correct person holding the reins.

For more information, please call (305) 248-5189 or visit the YMCA at 1034 NE 8th St, Homestead, FL 33030
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