



The Newly Expanded Andover/North Andover YMCA

Scott Shurtleff on July 30th, 2016

For many, the inevitable arrival of summer means lots of hours spent in the ocean, lake or backyard pool. Whether the season brings summer camp, family outings or work-hooky beach days, good swimming skills are essential for maximum fun and safety. For newcomers to the water, swimming abilities can be honed in the offseason at the newly expanded Merrimack Valley YMCA facility in Andover, which recently added a third indoor pool.

But the vastly enlarged facility offers much more than swimming. The building, which is located in Andover on the North Andover border, boasts several state-of-the-art exercise studios. Various workouts, including Zumba, yoga and the challenging TRX, were all available in the YMCA's old building, but now each has its own dedicated room. (In the past, space was shared and converted depending on usage.)

The building is so large now (100,000 square feet) that Andover/North Andover Executive Director Alex Turek says, "It enhances the workout experience, just walking from one place to another."

Despite its size, the entire establishment is thoughtfully laid out. Turek says the child care areas and after school programs that once were scattered haphazardly around the building are now

centrally located in a secure area near the main entry. Also new is the sprawling senior center, which allows for casual activities and direct access to the main workout areas. There are five locker rooms now, greatly easing the overcrowded conditions of the past. Even the parking lot has grown. Surprisingly, the smallest growth has been in the cost of membership.



Andover/North Andover YMCA executives finally get a calm moment after more than a year of renovations at the Andover facility. Alex Turek (left), executive director; and Jim Kapelson, vice president of marketing & membership, are part of a dedicated team who promote and maintain the massive new structure. Photo by Kevin Harkins.

“Of course fees have naturally increased,” says Marketing Vice President James Kapelson. “Existing members have a brief grandfathered period before being subjected to the newer rates, which are still quite reasonable given the amount and quality of services.”

Membership dues alone did not pay for the \$22 million expansion. Turek credits fundraising efforts that date back several years, along with tax-exempt bond financing. To help with repayment, a large part of the building has been leased to Lawrence General Hospital, which has established a rehabilitation therapy clinic on the site.

And, in what might seem like a minor miracle, the Andover/North Andover YMCA’s main building managed to stay open throughout the two years of construction. “[We have] patient members,” Turek says.

The Andover/North Andover YMCA is not unlike any of the other 2,700 YMCAs across the country. None of the Young Men’s Christian Associations are exclusively for the young, or for men, or for Christians. Although differing in features and splendor, all adhere to diversity inclusion, community standards and the obligatory three guiding principles that are symbolically displayed on the organization’s logo: The red triangle symbol represents body, mind and spirit; all of which can be challenged and honed within.

Despite being updated with trendy training apparatuses and high tech learning centers, the newly expanded Andover/North Andover Y continues to offer traditional features and programs. Free weights and basketballs are as ubiquitous as ever, as are the cardio machines, which are spread out over a vast tract of the old gym, which has been modernized with new air conditioning.

The YMCA's popular summer camps are also still offered, including day trips to family spots and weeklong getaways to camps on New Hampshire's Lake Winnepesaukee. All summer camp programs are sponsored and organized by all of the YMCAs under the Merrimack Valley YMCA umbrella, including Andover/North Andover YMCA, Lawrence YMCA and Methuen YMCA. Members of each are also welcome to use the facilities at all three locations.



The main level fitness center offers separate workout rooms. The recently completed project also features areas for children and seniors and a physical therapy clinic, which is an extension of Lawrence General Hospital's outpatient rehab program. Photo by Kevin Harkins.

The Andover/North Andover YMCA's new structure wraps around its original building, seamlessly enveloping it on three sides. Harvey Construction of Bedford, N.H., performed the bulk of the work, but when asked about the finished facility, rather than discussing the highlights and challenges of the job, project manager Anne Dodd says, "The wows and smiles are my favorite part."

YMCA employees have noticed a profound increase in activity since the new building opened. "We are a lot busier around here now, and not just with those walking through the door," says Andover/North Andover Welcome Center Coordinator Linda Comeau. "The new online registration feature, for camps and classes, is still working out some bugs. So, we are on the phone answering questions."

YMCA member Aram Smith of Andover loves the new facility. "There is so much more space and workout options. Plus, even with the new rates, it is such a good deal for all that you get," he says.

One new feature at the Andover/North Andover YMCA is the Active Science program, coordinated with nearby Merrimack College. The nationally implemented health-monitoring system studies the physical activities of school children and then compiles the data to learn the effects of exercise on the learning process.

For more information about joining the Andover/North Andover YMCA, visit MVYMCMA.org or call (978) 685-3541.

