

YMCA renovation takes major step forward; New child care center ready for play

By Bill Kirk bkirk@andovertownsman.com | Posted: Thursday, June 25, 2015 6:58 am

About 100 people who showed up for this month's ribbon-cutting for the Andover/North Andover YMCA's new, expanded child care center got an added treat.

They also got to check out the progress on the \$22 million expansion/renovation that has been going on at the YMCA branch at 165 Haverhill St. for more than a year.

The 7,700-square-foot child care center is the first, completed portion of the sweeping project.

Gary Morelli, the new CEO of the Merrimack Valley YMCA, started his new job last Monday, taking over for Stephen Ives, who left last week after 10 years on the job to take a new post at a regional YMCA in Ohio.

"It was a monumental day as we opened the first section of our renovation/expansion of the Andover/North Andover branch of the Merrimack Valley YMCA," Morelli said. "It's a beautiful, new, state-of-the-art facility and is an example of what the rest of the building will be like. It was very exciting and motivational."

Morelli, formerly the chief operating officer who has been with the local YMCA for 19 years, said while the facility has always had child care, it was never in its own, dedicated space.

"We've been doing child care for many years," he said. "We serve 600 children a day. But this is the first dedicated center. It's not shared space. That's what makes this unique and contributes to the quality of the facility."

He said the program is accredited by the state and will now offer educational, play and socialization space.



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TIM JEAN/Staff photo Stephen Ives, outgoing CEO and president of the Merrimack Valley YMCA, helps christen the new child care center at the Andover/North Andover branch earlier this month. After 10 years at the valley's YMCA, Ives departed last week to lead a regional YMCA in Ohio.

“It has everything you can imagine,” he said. The local Y offers both pre-school and after-school programs.

Ground-breaking for the entire expansion project was held in April 2014. The project was expected to take about 16 months, but now appears as if it will be slightly longer than that.

Morelli said the nonprofit organization has raised \$7.5 million and is aiming for \$8 million to augment the \$14 million in financing. So far, the project is about 60 percent complete.

“We still have naming opportunities for interested people,” he said, adding that the naming rights for the child care center are among those still available.

He said members have been very understanding as the project has continued and that membership has been increasing at the branch, and now stands at about 9,000.

“There’s a lot of excitement and people want to be part of that,” he said.

In addition to the Andover/North Andover branch, the Merrimack Valley YMCA also operates branches in Lawrence and Methuen and three camps in New Hampshire. The regional YMCA has 13,000 members.

The Andover/North Andover project was designed by Sasaki Associates, a Watertown architectural firm, and is being built by Harvey Construction of Bedford, N.H.