

## Ives leaves Valley YMCA for Ohio job

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A bike workshop isn't something you'd expect from a YMCA.

But last year, the Merrimack Valley YMCA agreed to sponsor BiciCocina, a non-profit shop that refurbishes donated bicycles, in Lawrence after meeting with a family physician with an idea to combat childhood obesity.

That kind of creativity and community involvement, as well as a drive to tackle a nationwide childhood obesity problem, will be one of the legacies Merrimack Valley Y chief executive Stephen Ives leaves when he departs next month to take over the YMCA of Central Ohio.

Anne Whalen, executive director of the Merrimack Valley Y's Methuen branch, said the YMCA under Ives' guidance offered leadership training for staff and volunteers to encourage that kind of thinking.

"He encourages his staff and volunteers to be very innovative, and that has translated to the leadership team and direct service staff coming up with some creative programming, which we've done in Methuen," she said.

John Riser, a family physician at the Greater Lawrence Family Health Center, launched BiciCocina last year with the YMCA's backing.

The Methuen branch opened shortly before Ives took the helm, and Whalen said he has encouraged the staff to pitch ideas specifically suited for their community.

"He created a culture or environment where people can be creative and really thrive. That I would say is his legacy, really getting people to think outside the box and think of the Y as more than a gym-and-swim," she said.

Ives has been deeply involved in Lawrence over the years, including joining the city's Healthy Active Living task force as a co-chair.



### Ives leaves Valley YMCA for Ohio job

Merrimack Valley Y chief executive Stephen Ives is leaving to take over the YMCA of Central Ohio.

"He was so involved in the community, it became part of his life," said Julian Villegas, executive director of the Lawrence branch. "It's hard to find CEOs who do that. He was really invested in all our communities."

Lawrence Mayor Daniel Rivera said Ives opened up the Y for the Police Department, giving them free memberships and a place to work out, and managed the annual Brickman Sprint Triathlon.

"It's a big loss for the city," Rivera said. "Steve brought a lot of leadership and helped make the Y a bigger part of the community."

The Y also launched an initiative with Merrimack College called Active Science, which combines exercise with exploratory learning activities to address both a national health priority of reducing child obesity and support academic development in areas such as science, technology, engineering and math. The national YMCA organization plans to expand that program into its nationwide network.

"He has really played an important role advocating physical activity in the city of Lawrence," Villegas said, noting that the obesity rate for children in Lawrence hovers in the mid-40 percent range.

And in Andover, Ives spearheaded the push and the fund raising for the nearly-completed \$21 million branch expansion and renovation project, a portion of which will open next month. The facility will house a senior center, which caught the attention of Andover resident Rosalyn Wood.

She said her late husband's family left money for the town of Andover, a part of which was to be invested in a senior center. The money wound up being split between a youth center that seniors could use in the morning located downtown, and a \$1 million donation to the Andover/North Andover YMCA, which is served by a Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority bus.

"He's done a wonderful job here, and that's exactly why they came to get him," Wood said.

Ives' last day will be June 21, the YMCA said. After that, he will take over the YMCA of Central Ohio, a \$45 million system with 13 branches, 2,000 staff and a service area of 2 million people based in Columbus.

He will oversee a number of social service initiatives including a shelter and transitional housing for 1,000 people, as well as their effort in developing the YMCA of Central Ohio as a partner in the Active Science initiative.

"Serving as the CEO of the Merrimack Valley YMCA has been an extraordinary personal and professional experience. I have deep connections here and a passion for the communities we serve," Ives said in a statement released Wednesday.

Before coming to the Merrimack Valley, Ives previously served as president and CEO of the Northern York County Family YMCA in Maine for 11 years, as well as a program director for the Greater Portland Y for seven years prior.

The Merrimack Valley YMCA Corporate Board of Directors voted to appoint current Chief Operating Officer Gary Morelli as CEO and Frank Kenneally as COO for a transition period lasting from the end of June through Dec. 31.

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