YMCA: Helping hands for healthy communities

By PATRICE FISHER
STAFF WRITER

NEW BRITAIN — While the Village People’s popular tune ignites dancing, the acronym “YMCA” represents much more than just a song.

The organization more closely symbolizes a lighthouse at the center of our community, a welcoming beacon for everyone. The Y is made up of people of all ages and from every walk of life, working side by side to strengthen communities.

The YMCA is a collaboration of volunteers and neighbors, working towards a greater purpose. CEO John Benigni calls it “a place where families spend quality time together and build relationships that deepen our sense of belonging.”

A nonprofit entity whose success came about by benevolence and neighborhood hardship makes its goal to be socially responsible in a meaningful way. This is why Benigni is so hopeful that the Y’s preschool and daycare programs, Camp Thundermoon, and an October fundraiser will continue to inspire its mission.

On June 24, Camp Thundermoon opens to children in grades kindergarten through 10. This nine-week state-certified program is centered on mind, body and spirit and is divided into age-appropriate groups. As Benigni explains, “Mind includes reading stories, and exploring science activities such as Rocketry and Robotics STEM programs. Body includes keeping our campers active with capture the flag, kickball, dodgeball, Gaga pit, four square, yoga, and more. Spirit includes creative camp improvisation skits, singing camp songs, and dancing.”

The program usually averages about 150 kids a week and parents can register their children by going to the website and printing the forms.

Forms can be turned in at either the New Britain or Berlin location. Registration is available now and through the summer. Camp Thundermoon is held at Willard Elementary School in Berlin, and is open to all. A bus option is available for New Britain families. Camp scholarships are available and Care4Kids is accepted. Benigni further emphasizes how important it is to provide for those in need by offering state certified preschool and childcare services to families. Two years ago the organization expanded its child care offerings by adding an infant, toddler and preschool center on Hart Street.

There are 40 slots available and two smaller locations in New Britain, and a larger one in Berlin. Center pricing is based on a sliding scale policy and financial assistance is available through the Connecticut Care4Kids program. The school readiness preschool program at the New Britain YMCA at 50 High St., also includes a free family membership with enrollment.

In October, the Meriden-New Britain-Berlin YMCA will sponsor its largest fundraising event yet, Fall Into Endless Summer, to extend its hand for the needs of the community recreationally, educationally and to be a real resource for families now and into the future.” All proceeds from the event benefit their Annual Support Campaign which aims to provide over $200,000 in financial assistance. Many of the children and families who receive this assistance would not have the opportunity to learn how to swim, go to summer camp or participate in the Y’s childcare or sports programs if it wasn’t for this financial support.

For more information on the New Britain-Berlin YMCA or to sign up for any of its programs or membership, visit www.nbbymca.org or call 860-229-3787. The fitness center at the New Britain YMCA at 50 High St., is open 24/7.

By JULIET BARNES

WESLEY BUNNELL | STAFF

Juliet Barnes is all smiles as she rides on the outdoor swing at the New Britain YMCA Monday afternoon during its school readiness program.

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