

# CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITIES

## YMCA OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

MARCH 2026



## FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

Dear Friends,

At YMCA of Southwest Florida, our work is rooted in one powerful belief: when we create opportunities, we change lives.

This season has been a remarkable example of that belief in action. Across our association, we have seen students launch weather balloons nearly 40,000 feet into the sky, teens step onto college campuses to envision their futures, seniors gather in fellowship and wellness and our communities rally together to raise critical funds that ensure access for all.

When we talk about enrichment and increasing access to youth programs, we are talking about much more than exposure. We are guiding young people through program exploration, career planning, goal setting, and action planning. We are helping them discover their strengths and take confident steps to become the best version of themselves.

At the same time, we remain deeply committed to Healthy Living and Social Responsibility, ensuring seniors stay connected, families stay supported and communities stay strong.

None of this happens alone. It is made possible by our volunteers, partners, sponsors, donors and dedicated staff who live out our mission every day.

Thank you for believing in the work of the Y and for standing beside us as we continue to strengthen Southwest Florida.

With gratitude,

Gene T. Jones  
 President and CEO  
 YMCA of Southwest Florida



**YMCA OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA IS DEDICATED TO POSITIVELY IMPACTING THE LIFE OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA.**

**YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

Nurturing the potential of every child and teen for a path to success.

**HEALTHY LIVING**

Improving health and well-being through partnerships with health care.

**SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Foster a greater sense of engagement to provide support to our neighbors.

## YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

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### SKY ACADEMY ENGLEWOOD: LAUNCHING LEARNING TO NEW HEIGHTS



Learning came alive in a powerful way when students at SKY Academy Englewood launched a high-altitude weather balloon as part of an immersive STEM experience.

With guidance from their eighth-grade STEM teacher and mentors from the Englewood Amateur Radio Society, students prepared a helium-filled latex balloon equipped with a lightweight payload system designed to transmit real-time atmospheric data. As the wind aligned and the moment arrived, students released the balloon, watching it climb rapidly into the sky.

Cheers erupted. Cameras recorded. Science became real. The balloon transmitted altitude, temperature, GPS coordinates, speed, solar data, date and time as it soared to nearly 40,000 feet. Students who had been studying gravity, atmospheric pressure and physics were suddenly witnessing those principles in action.

This hands-on project gave 63 students the opportunity to connect classroom theory to real-world application. They learned how helium expands at higher altitudes, how communication systems track location and how amateur radio operators provide essential support during emergencies.

Perhaps most importantly, they learned that technology is something to understand and master. By demystifying the digital world, students gain confidence, and that spark of curiosity can grow into future careers in engineering, aviation, meteorology, communications and beyond.



### BEACON COLLEGE TOURS: EXPANDING VISION AND OPPORTUNITY

Forty Beacon students recently visited Florida Gulf Coast University and the University of Miami, stepping onto college campuses and envisioning their futures.

For many, it was their first time walking through lecture halls, touring residence facilities and engaging with admissions staff. The experience transformed abstract ideas about "college someday" into tangible, achievable goals.

These tours are a critical step in increasing awareness of career pathways. Students begin connecting personal interests to degree programs. They ask questions about majors, internships, financial aid and campus life. They begin planning, not just dreaming.

Program Exploration becomes Career Planning. Career Planning becomes Goal Setting. Goal Setting becomes Action Planning. And with each step, confidence grows.

### EXPANDING ACCESS: A NEW SUMMER CAMP SITE

Through a partnership with DeSoto County, we are expanding our reach by opening a new camp location at the Turner Center in Arcadia this summer.

This site will provide safe, enriching spaces for youth to grow academically, socially and physically. From STEM enrichment to arts, physical activity, and character development, this program ensures that geography is never a barrier to opportunity.

Summer is not simply a break from school, it is a season of growth.

## HEALTHY LIVING

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### SENIOR HEALTH DAY: CONNECTION, WELLNESS AND COMMUNITY



Across our association, **more than 1,700 seniors gathered to participate in Senior Health Day** — a vibrant celebration of wellness and connection at all ten YMCA Wellness Facilities.

From group fitness demonstrations and balance classes to health screenings and educational workshops, each branch offered opportunities to support healthy aging. Seniors engaged in movement, learned from health professionals, explored local resources and most importantly, connected with one another.

The YMCA understands that isolation can be one of the greatest threats to senior well-being. Community is essential to mental, emotional and physical health. Senior Health Day created space for laughter, new friendships and renewed energy.

Healthy living at the Y goes beyond exercise. It is about belonging. It is about creating spaces where seniors feel seen, valued, and supported.

### SPONSORING COMMUNITY THROUGH SPORTS

As we continue expanding opportunities for healthy living, we invite community partners to consider sponsoring a YMCA team or league.

Each year, hundreds of youth and families participate in YMCA sports programs that emphasize teamwork, skill-building, sportsmanship and character development.

From basketball and soccer to seasonal leagues and clinics, these programs provide safe, structured environments where young athletes can grow in confidence and ability.

**Sponsoring a YMCA team or league is more than brand visibility — it is a direct investment in youth development and community wellness.** Sponsors help offset costs, expand access for families who need financial assistance and ensure that every child has the opportunity to play, regardless of their circumstances.

When you sponsor a YMCA team, you are doing more than supporting a season, you are helping build leadership skills, lifelong friendships and healthy habits that extend far beyond the field or court.

We welcome the opportunity to partner with local businesses and community leaders who share our commitment to strengthening families and inspiring youth through the power of sport.

Together, we can ensure that every child has the chance to play, grow and thrive. To learn more please reach out to [give@ymcaswfl.org](mailto:give@ymcaswfl.org).

## SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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### CASINO ROYALE: A NIGHT OF GENEROSITY



On January 31st, supporters gathered for Casino Royale benefitting the Sarasota City YMCA and Palmer Ranch YMCA.

The evening sparkled with energy as guests filled blackjack and roulette tables. Enjoying friendly competition and elegant surroundings, though the chips were play, the generosity was very real.

**Together, the event raised an incredible \$335,890.**

These funds will support life-changing programs, financial assistance, youth initiatives and wellness opportunities across the Sarasota City and Palmer Ranch communities. Every hand played at the tables represented a hand extended to someone in need.

Casino Royale was more than a fundraiser, it was a powerful example of social responsibility in action.

### A NIGHT IN THE BIG APPLE: VENICE YMCA



On February 21st, the spirit of giving continued at A Night in the Big Apple, benefitting the Venice YMCA. Hosted at Plantation Golf & Country Club, the venue transformed into a chic New York-inspired evening filled with energy and purpose.

Guests enjoyed exceptional dining, exciting auctions and powerful stories that highlighted the impact of the Venice YMCA on families,

seniors and youth throughout the community. The evening reflected both sophistication and heart, a celebration of what is possible when a community comes together to support its Y.

Each children have, auction bid and gift, seniors remain connected and families receive support when they need it most.

### UPCOMING SPECIAL EVENTS

