

YMCA GIFT: 'INTERACTION BETWEEN GENERATIONS'

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Like many others before him have done, Boise YMCA CEO Jim Everett holds "the Y is more than recreation programs" as one of the main reasons to put a facility in Ketchum.

"If all we do is teach a kid to swim, we've missed the boat," Everett said. Teaching manners, values, confidence and leadership are part of the package, he said. In addition, a mingling of generations as well as income levels in Boise and other Y facilities stands high on his list of benefits.

"The interaction between generations is something we've lost so much of in this country," said Everett. Everett also noted some people wouldn't want such mingling. In Boise, he said, homeless people belong to the YMCA, a fact that has turned away some residents in favor of more expensive health clubs.

"There will be people who will not want that kind of environment," said Everett. "But the overwhelming majority like the diversity."

These issues and others figured during a discussion held Tuesday, August 3, in Ketchum with Caldwell Mayor Garrett Nancolas and city officials including Bellevue Mayor John Barton, Ketchum Mayor Ed Simon, former Sun Valley Mayor Ruth Lieder, Ketchum City Council Member Randy Hall, Keith Perry, Lucy Bourret and Amy Federko.

The meeting is part of a series of small gatherings held to educate the public about the Wood River Community YMCA proposed for the city of Ketchum property at Warm Springs and Saddle roads.

During discussions, YMCA executive Rick Tallman noted the "free land" was a big reason Ketchum could afford a YMCA.

One resident objected strenuously to his words.

"The land isn't free," said Pam Ritzau. "A lot of us paid a lot of money for it. A YMCA may be the best use of the land but believe me, it's not free to those of us that pay taxes. We're paying pretty big taxes."

Tallman apologized.

"I'm sorry, I wanted to praise the generosity of the city in making this land available," said Tallman.

Land purchased by Ketchum voters for parking, cultural and recreational activities is one of the main reasons Ketchum is the location of choice for the new YMCA.

Sun Valley residents said they were looking forward to "a place to gather" that likes children.

Also, Hailey hasn't offered any land for its own version of the YMCA.

"No one has offered to put it in Hailey," said Carol Waller, executive director for the Sun Valley-Ketchum Chamber and Visitors Center. "It's not an apples to apples situation when people say the YMCA ought to be in Hailey."

Waller recently released survey results from 523 Sun Valley-Ketchum Chamber members who were asked if they supported the city of Ketchum entering into a long-term lease with the Wood River Community YMCA for the Park and Ride Lot.

Nineteen percent of those contacted responded, with 45 percent weighing in as supporters and 41 percent putting thumbs down. A whopping 13 percent are uncertain.

"We generally survey members if the board plans to take a position but in this case, we will not take a position," said Waller. "We did want to release the results, though."

The results mean a pretty even split, with some opportunity to change a few minds.

Teresa Beahan, executive director for the Wood River Community YMCA, said she knew that meant more public meetings and more outreach by the YMCA.

"We meet with at least one person a day," she said. "You know, we didn't have the mentality to come build it and it will work. In our February 2002 study we interviewed 400 people and they felt there was a need in the north valley for cultural, recreational and educational services."

Beahan said the YMCA business plan is practically bullet proof.

Besides, as an argument for those wanting the facility in the south valley, Hailey doesn't officially want a YMCA and some people are vehemently opposed.

"People thinking the Y should be in Hailey is absolutely the craziest thing," said Mary Austin Crofts, executive director of Blaine County Recreation District programs at the Community Campus adjacent to Wood River High School. "Why would you spend \$16 million down here? Hasn't anyone heard of the Community Campus?"

Austin Crofts said starting in September, the Hailey facility will have the Hub teen center open seven days a week with an Internet cafe, swimming pool, Nordic ski center, Tae Kwan Do classes, art, gymnastics and other after-school activities.

As one of the most outspoken opponents of a Hailey Y, Austin Crofts was very direct about her feelings.

"It would kill everything we've done," said Austin Crofts. "We don't want a Y in Hailey. We don't need a Y in Hailey. I would just be sick to my stomach."