

Gothenburg truly is an All-America City

The All-America City competition is a unique opportunity to showcase all the good our community is doing. The event takes place over three days and offers an unparalleled chance to network and share best practices with members of communities across the nation. I had the privilege of being nominated as our team's captain. Along with the title came the obligation to attend a captain's briefing each morning at 7am. These briefings consisted of a review of the daily agenda where any logistical changes were addressed.

After the first captain's briefing on Friday, June 21, it was almost time for our first on-site rehearsal session. Each city was allotted one hour to practice on the actual stage where we would later deliver our formal presentation. We completed a run-through and received constructive feedback from a few sample jurors. These sample jurors, as well as most of the event's organizers, were actually members of delegations from prior competitions. These were individuals who volunteered to help ensure we enjoyed the same caliber experience they did when they were competing. Over the next 24 hours, we had three more hours of rehearsal in a different, much smaller, conference room. That's when we implemented recommended changes and polished our presentation.

Our official presentation was after lunch on Saturday, June 22. Our entire group was huddled in the hallway outside the main ballroom. The feeling in the air was that of immense excitement, coupled with a healthy dose of nerves. An event volunteer, who insisted on being referred to as "Boston Dan," kept us informed on the time remaining until we were up, as well as keeping us quiet while another presentation was in progress on the other side of the wall. Then it was our time to shine. We walked in, delivered our presentation just as we rehearsed, fielded questions from the jurors that drilled into the content of our presentation, and before we knew it we were done. Months of work culminated in one 20-minute presentation.

The atmosphere of the awards ceremony on Sunday evening, June 23, more closely resembled a Jimmy Buffett concert than a community civic competition. The audience was a mass of brightly colored shirts identifying different delegations with prideful chants and beach balls flying in every direction. There were 10 winners to be selected from the 20 finalists, in no particular order. We anxiously listened over the next hour and half as winners 1-8 were announced and began to wonder if our presentation was going to be enough. Then as the presenter described the next winner as a "small community" and we immediately sat bolt upright in our chairs. As soon as she announced Gothenburg as a winner, our group erupted in celebration. Accepting the award was an intense moment of vindication that what we've got going on here in Gothenburg is something special, and on par with the best communities in the nation.



ABOVE: Members of the delegation were all smiles after being announced as one of 10 All-America City Award winners. RIGHT: A truly proud moment for Mike Bacon as he gave Gothenburg's acceptance remarks.



Will Rahjes
GIC Board Member
& AAC delegation captain

The YMCA at Gothenburg Health is changing lives after just one year

I think we have all heard the phrase, "Time flies when you're having fun!" Well, the first-year anniversary of the opening of the YMCA has now come and gone and I think it's safe to say that we are all having a lot of fun.

The grand opening for the newly constructed facility was in April 2018, and since that day, Gothenburg will never be the same, as the YMCA has become a place for individuals and families to come together to improve their lives. The facility has a full-size basketball court, state-of-the-art workout equipment, rooms for workout classes, a walking track, cafeteria, salt-water swimming pool, child care area and locker rooms. All these amenities would mean nothing if we didn't have the people to enjoy them.

It was once said by a man who danced with wolves, "If we build it, they will come." In Gothenburg, this has become true, as community members have joined the YMCA for a healthier life.

Julie Czochara is the director of the YMCA and it is her job to make things run as smoothly as possible. With a team of 30 employees, she has been able to make sense of the madness, all while making it look easy. Julie moved to Gothenburg a year prior to the grand opening date.

When she arrived in our community, Julie immediately began to plan and develop a strategy for success. Working out of an office located in the same building as the Gothenburg Chamber of Commerce, Julie was able to kick off several YMCA programs for kids while encouraging people to sign up as YMCA members to create a good membership foundation.

When I asked Julie about some of her favorite times in Gothenburg, she said, "I have had a lot of great memories here, but my proudest moment was the grand opening celebration of the YMCA. It was wonderful to see the community come out to celebrate as so many people were involved in getting the YMCA built."

As Julie and I continued our discussion, I could really feel her intensity and passion for her job. Julie mentioned that she is very happy that the YMCA's after school program and the summer day camps have been so well attended. These YMCA activities are keeping kids safe, teaching them important life skills and providing them with a way to be physically active.



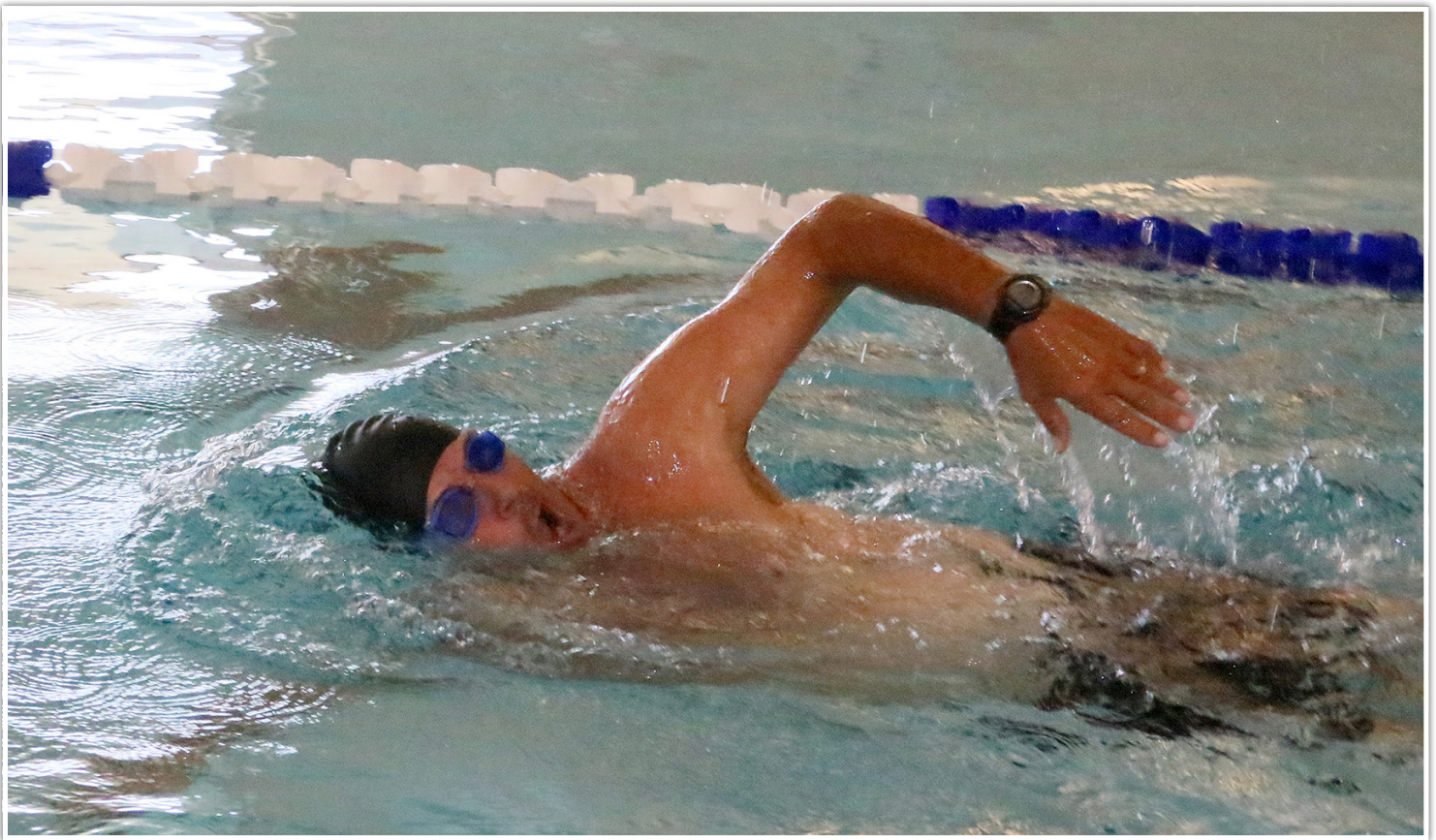
Gothenburg is the smallest community in the nation to have a YMCA. In its first year of existence, the YMCA:

- provided \$30,000 in scholarship funding.
- signed up more than 1,900 individual members. That number exceeds the three-year goal.
- had more than 48,000 visits to facility.
- had 3,277 participants in various programs.

Julie also mentioned that she is proud of the Gothenburg swim teams and how well they have done. The swim team is now able to have an extended year with both summer and winter season teams, thanks to the indoor pool. Several kids are now able to swim year-round and it has been fun to see several parents also competing.

Not necessarily a kid (but definitely a kid at heart) is my friend Steve Johnson. I knew I wanted to write this article on the YMCA and he seemed, as you will understand, like the perfect guy to write about.

The other day I was at Steve's office at The Home Agency, and as we talked I noticed something different about him. He looked younger. I mentioned to him that he was looking younger, healthier and more physically fit. Steve gave me a big smile and began to tell me about how he was getting himself into shape and how his overall fitness had been dramatically improved with swimming.



Since the YMCA at Gothenburg Health opened in April 2018, Steve Johnson has become an avid swimmer. Since the former marathon runner can no longer hit the pavement for exercise, he said the YMCA pool is where he gets his exercise.

Once the announcement was made that the YMCA was, in fact, going to be constructed, Steve made a decision to get healthier by becoming a swimmer. I mentioned to Steve that I, personally, would be nervous to “just start swimming,” and I asked how he got started.

“I have always liked to swim, but when I started swimming for exercise, I could only go down and back once without taking a break (one lap). I worked at it and built up my endurance and soon I could go 10 laps without a break. To me, that was a big deal. But now I can go more than a mile, and that is a real bigger deal!”

It was fun to hear Steve talk about how he got in better shape with swimming.

“I knew my running days were over,” he said. Steve was a marathon runner in his younger days. “So I decided to try swimming. I recently had a hip replacement, so I wanted to find an exercise that had little to no impact on my new joint. Swimming has made me a very healthy 71-year-old!”

I could see the excitement in Steve’s eyes as we continued to talk about how the YMCA has changed his life for the better. I began to wonder how many more stories like his

there are in our community. When you think about it, the dreaming, planning and building of the Gothenburg YMCA is a major success story for Gothenburg and it was done the “Gothenburg Way,” with a big dream and a whole lot of hard work!

One comment Steve made as I was leaving his office was, “The bottom line is that people need to get out and exercise, and the YMCA makes that easier to do!”

I am proud of our community, I am proud of the Gothenburg Improvement Company’s involvement, and I am proud of all the people that have signed up and become members. In Gothenburg, there is nothing that we can’t do, if we work together in achieving it, and we do it the “Gothenburg Way!”

If you are not currently a GIC member and would like to be more involved, please give me a call at 308-537-7181. I would enjoy having the opportunity to talk to you about the benefits of GIC and how you too can get involved.

Luke Rickertsen

*GIC Board Member
& Marketing Committee Chairman*

GIC, CRA continue addressing community's housing needs

We know from the housing survey conducted in the spring of 2018 that Gothenburg needs 10 new houses every year for the next five years to accommodate housing requirements of our population. It was almost a year ago that the Community Redevelopment Authority, backed by the Gothenburg Improvement Company, signed the documents to move forward with an aggressive approach to tackle this issue in Gothenburg.

Putting economic development sales tax dollars to work, Gothenburg's latest housing project resulted in contracts with Hilbers Construction and Five Star to construct seven new houses on 25th Street and in the cul-de-sac now known as 25th Place. So where are we now?

Notably, this project spurred additional housing growth. Hilbers Construction purchased a lot for its own spec home development on 26th Street. An independent family that is new to town also purchased a lot on the corner of Avenue I and 26th Street and has contracted with Five Star to build a home. This bold approach to housing will result in the construction of nine new houses in our community.

If you have watched the construction progress over the past year, you have seen the near completion of two houses in the cul-de-sac and both of Hilbers' houses. These homes are all under contract to be sold and should close within the next 30-60 days. For the CRA's part, the funds invested into construction will be repaid in full. So far, two families that are new to this community have taken advantage of this new housing inventory, while additional families have moved within town, freeing up housing at a lower price point.

Although this project, just like any other construction project, has had some growing pains along the way, we



This home built by Five Star in the 25th Place cul-de-sac is nearly complete.

have done exactly what we set out to do – create more housing options for the people of Gothenburg and those looking to locate to our great community.

We will not stop here. The CRA has issued another request for proposals not only for its two remaining lots on 26th Street but also for its lots located north of the city shop. The lesson to be learned from the success of this most recent project is we cannot rest on our laurels. We have all noticed the impact of losing Baldwin and Shopko. But we are an All-America City. We have a brand new YMCA, a hospital that is ever expanding, a school district that responsibly and successfully produces great young adults, and a thriving business community. People want to move here. Businesses want to move here. We will replace Baldwin and Shopko. When we do, our housing needs will become even more apparent. Know that right now, we are already working to meet those needs.

Colten Venteicher
GIC Board Vice President

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