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COMMUNITY OVERWHELMINGLY SUPPORTS LAKESHORE FITNESS CENTER REOPENING AS A YMCA

MUSKEGON – The Muskegon community overwhelmingly supports returning the Lakeshore Fitness Center to its YMCA roots according to a new independent survey released today. The center, which served 3,700 local residents until it was closed in May by the Muskegon Community College trustees, is seen as a nearly perfect fit for YMCA programs.

The MCC trustees, who currently are soliciting requests for proposals on the 45 year-old fitness center, formerly a YMCA, welcomed the survey conducted by Phil Balducci Associates. This work and analysis is being paid for by community donors. Muskegon attorney Gary Neal and film producer Roger Rapoport, both longtime fitness center members, commissioned the study.

Responding to the independent study, Muskegon YMCA CEO Bruce Spoelman said: “The Muskegon YMCA recognizes the interests of the community as expressed in the recent Balducci report. With willing partners and other leadership including capital funding and sustained community support, we could lead the effort with vision and operational expertise to redevelop the property at 900 W. Western into a successful fitness facility for Muskegon's future.”

- Eight out of ten (78%) area residents believe that opening a re-imagined Lakeshore Fitness Center as a new YMCA is a good idea.
- Three quarters (76%) of local residents agree that opening a re-imagined, Lakeshore Fitness Center as a branch of the YMCA will make Muskegon a better place to live (32% completely agree plus 44% somewhat agree).
- Almost universally (97%), past members of the Lakeshore Fitness Center believe re-opening the facility as a YMCA branch is a good idea. The survey estimated optimistically that 2,748 past member would rejoin the cleaned facility at rates of \$69/\$49/\$39/\$39.
- If a new owner simply cleans, fixes, and re-opens the Lakeshore Fitness Center in compliance with Covid-19 safety requirements, 9% of area residents, who were not members when the Lakeshore Fitness Center

closed, claim to be very likely to join at monthly rate of \$69/\$49/\$39/\$39. This translates to an estimated 2,055 full-pay member units.

Other major findings from the Balducci study are:

- Forty-six percent (46%) of area residents claim they agree (8% completely agree plus 38% somewhat agree) that, if asked, they would donate \$25 to help the Y renovate and maintain a quality new fitness center in Muskegon.
- One half (50%) of those responding to this survey believe that since the closing of the Lakeshore Fitness Center, many residents have not been able to find the healthy living programs and classes they want and need.
- Past members are primarily interested in adult based facilities and programing, whereas potential new members express an interest in some adult activities but also offerings directed at youth and teens.
- Of 14 major facilities and programs tested, those most likely to attract usage from area residents, who were not Lakeshore Fitness Center members, at a re-imagined Lakeshore Fitness Center are:
 - An indoor multi-purposed pool (56%).
 - An indoor running / walking track (35%).
 - A state-of-the-art fitness center (30%).
 - A teen center (30%).

A complete copy of the completed survey is available on the Friends of the Muskegon Lakeshore Fitness Center Facebook site at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/folfc/> For more information on the survey results email Phil Balducci at phil@pbaresearch.com or contact him directly at (813) 760-3811 For questions about the survey project and community participation in the survey contact Roger Rapoport at (231) 720-0930 or rogerdrapoport@me.com Gary Neal can be reached at gneal@mccroskeylaw.com or (231) 726 4861

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Lakeshore Fitness Center was originally built by the Muskegon YMCA with significant community philanthropy in the mid-1970s. Located on Muskegon Lake, the Y fitness center offered a wide range of recreation, health and fitness programs including swimming, a weight room, exercise machines, basketball yoga, child care, a summer fun club, and personal training until 2015 when it was purchased by Muskegon Community College. The college

continued to rent the swimming pool to the YMCA, and the Boys and Girls Club while also expanding membership as a significant discount to Silver Sneakers members. At the time it was closed by the college in May 2020 the fitness center membership had grown, according to fitness center staff, to approximately 3,700 members including 2,400 regular members and 1,300 discounted Silver Sneakers members.

Under the leadership of the Friends of the Muskegon Lakeshore Fitness Center numerous attempts were made to resume the major fundraising that had been a consistent part of the Y model for 40 years. The college, facing other philanthropic needs, elected to not follow this path and self-financed numerous improvements including significant purchases of new equipment while expanding staff.

Although the fitness center had operated in the black during the last year of YMCA ownership (2015) and started out well during the first year of MCC ownership, costs continued to grow alongside membership. Significant staff additions, the cost of outside management, a money losing discounted Silver Sneakers programs and other expenses, combined with the Covid-19 pandemic were all factors in the trustees decision to sell. Absent a major fund raising program it became increasingly difficult for the college to cover its deficit. Another alternative would have been for the college to raise monthly dues by approximately \$14 a month which could have theoretically covered the operating deficit. This route was not pursued by MCC.

Since purchasing the fitness center in 2015 the college approached numerous potential fitness center partners to help make it self sustaining. Among them were the Grand Rapids YMCA, medical organizations and other community groups. In addition the Friends group also approached the Muskegon City Commission for support. The college trustees have indicated an interest in selling to a buyer who would continue operating the fitness center in its present configuration.