



Health & Wellness

From its inception, the YWCA of Asheville has been committed to the physical health of the women it serves. Early on the YWCA leadership at both the Central YWCA and the Phyllis Wheatley branch understood the relationship between a woman's wellbeing and physical activity.



Camp Kenjocketee, 1920s. [0379]YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

The YWCA was a pioneer in health and fitness when it constructed 13 Grove Street to offer girls and women of Asheville the best spiritual, educational, recreational, and physical opportunities. The gymnasium gave girls and women a place to play basketball, volleyball, badminton, and other recreational games. The earliest YWCA programs for young girls such as Camp Kenjocketee and Girl Reserves included physical and recreational activities as central elements.



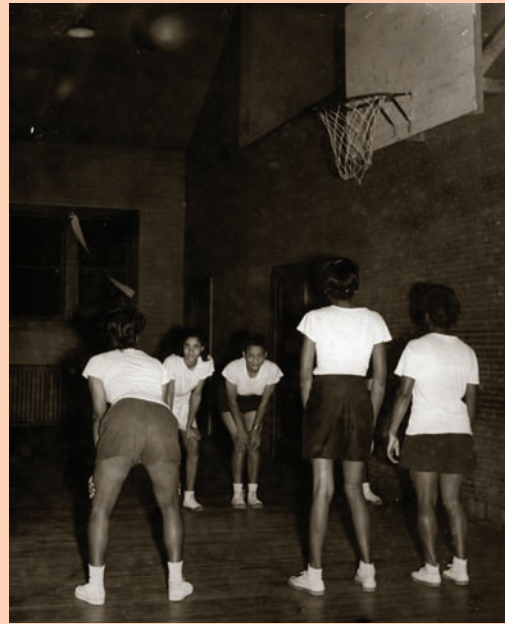
Junior Lifesaving Corps, 1920s. [0605]YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Park Girls Basketball Team, 1920s. [0613]YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

In 1927 the Central YWCA opened a pool and began extensive aquatics programming that would become renowned throughout Asheville for its excellent swimming instruction. Also in 1927 the YWCA began its long-standing relationship with the American Red Cross by offering certified swimming and lifeguarding classes. Around this same time the YWCA held the "Swim the Channel" contest, which challenged women to swim across the pool 1,760 times.

One of the earliest and most active YWCA committees was the Health Education Committee. In the 1920s and 1930s this committee scheduled lectures about health and hygiene, organized



Girls basketball at the Phyllis Wheatley branch, 1945. Photo courtesy of the YMI Cultural Center.



Tap dancing at Phyllis Wheatley branch, 1950s. [0644] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

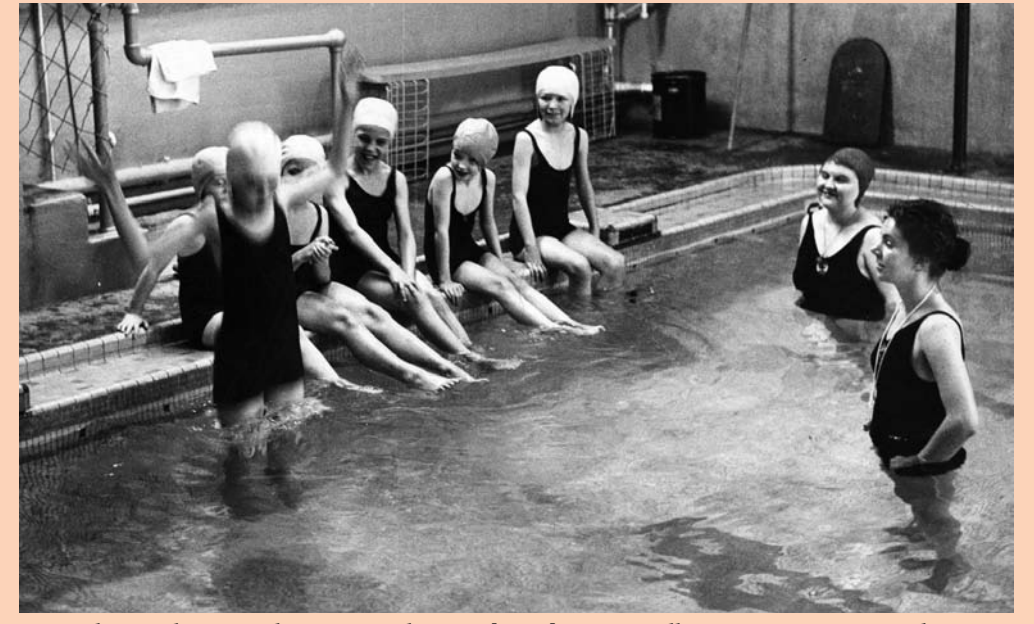


Women exercising at the Central YWCA, 1950s. [0055]YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

medical examinations for women (a requirement prior to using the pool or gymnasium), and held awareness events for the community including contests such as "Healthiest Girl in Asheville."

Recreational activities were also program highlights for girls participating at the Phyllis Wheatley branch. In fact, in 1938 the Phyllis Wheatley branch boasted the only full service gymnasium for Negroes in the South. Girls and boys from the Negro community used this facility for sports and games.

In addition to aquatics and basketball, the YWCA offered a wide range of physical fitness programs such as bellydancing, yoga, clogging, volleyball, table tennis, and soccer. Well before the beginning of the fitness movement of the 1970s, the YWCA was offering exercise classes and even had an early fitness center called "The Sleek Salon." In 2002, Club W: The YWCA Health & Fitness Center was opened, and at the same time, physical activity was also integrated into youth and childcare programs.



Swim class at the Central YWCA pool, 1959. [0291]YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Seniors exercise at the YWCA, 1970s. Photo courtesy of the YMI Cultural Center.

recently, the YWCA of Asheville has become committed to highlighting and addressing the racial health disparities that exist in our community. In the mid-1990s, the YWCA joined forces with Mission Hospitals and other community organizations to increase access to breast cancer screening through outreach efforts. In 2005 the YWCA began the Diabetes Wellness Program.



Gymnastics, 1980. [0163] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Children's games at the Phyllis Wheatley branch, 1955. [0642]YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

The YWCA has a history of providing health education to the community through nutrition classes, post-mastectomy support groups, health screenings, and its community garden. More



Health education class, 2001.

The YWCA's ongoing commitment to preventive health and community outreach makes it a leader in Asheville addressing health disparities.