



## Project fuels fitness

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*News-Gazette Photos/Andrew Sullivan*  
On Thursday, the Osceola Y held a groundbreaking ceremony for an expansion project at the fitness and meeting facility on Mabbette Street at Thacker Avenue in Kissimmee.

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Osceola County elected officials and Osceola Y members and staff came together Thursday to celebrate the groundbreaking of an expansion project that will add more than 10,000 square feet to the facility, including a much-needed adult locker room and a wellness center.

With a backdrop of construction workers engaged in the project, which started in August, local figureheads at the morning ceremony touted the benefits of the Osceola Y and praised local donors who made the addition possible.

The project will add 10,300 square feet to the Y, which is at 2117 W. Mabbette St., Kissimmee, allowing it to add a gathering area designed for members, families and friends to meet and talk and an expanded wellness center that will include a new studio cycling room and a new multipurpose room for aerobic classes and other uses. There also will be adult locker rooms, which will greatly help working people that uses the facility, Daniel Ickes, YMCA of Central Florida executive vice president of operations, said. Currently, there isn't enough space to allow workers to exercise during the day and get back to their jobs on time.

The expansion project, scheduled to be completed by spring of 2012, will grow the Osceola Y to about 30,000 square feet.

"It's more of an opportunity for people to join the Y," Ickes said. "By having a bigger footprint, we'll be able to serve more folks."

The project was fueled through the support of Dr. Phillips Charities and Osceola County Supervisor of Elections Mary Jane Arrington, who also is chairman of the Osceola Y board. Arrington led the Osceola County Y capital campaign and raised \$250,000, while Dr. Phillips Charities contributed a matching \$1.5 million to-ward the project. Arrington said it took her two years to raise the money by "banging on doors" and just stressing the importance of the Y in the community.



Local officials Osceola County Commissioner Michael Harford and Kissimmee Mayor Jim Swan joined local and regional representatives of the YMCA to commemorate the event.

"I was concerned with the economic times it would be a tough sell, but people were still willing to give," Arrington said. "It's all possible through the generosity of our community partners."

One of the selling points, Arrington said, was mentioning that nobody is turned away from the facility, which was built in 1974, for their inability to pay.

"Our mission is not only to make strong bodies, but strong minds and spirits," she said.

Dr. Phillips Charities grants support worthy capital projects and innovative programs of charities that address critical community needs, demonstrate the potential for ongoing community support and have a significant, lasting impact on the community, according to the organization's website.

Speaking to the group that gathered for the groundbreaking, Y member Gina Stephens said she and her husband, George, a pastor at The Father's House Church of God in Kissimmee, moved into the city in 2010. Last year, at age 49, she said before her 50th birthday, she wanted to lose 50 pounds and joined the Y. She has since achieved that goal.

"I'm on a healthier pathway to a better me," she said.