

Ironically,

ADVERTISEMENT

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Pottstown YMCA has proud history

According to the official history of the YMCA, the first Young Men's Christian Association was founded in 1844 in London as a "refuge of prayer and Bible study for young men seeking escape from the hazards of the street."

Pottstown's YMCA goes back almost as far, with its incorporation in 1880, using rented rooms. John Meigs, headmaster of The Hill School, was one of its first presidents. His son, Dwight, who succeeded his father as Hill School headmaster, oversaw the construction of a capacious facility at King and Evans streets in 1913. The building, enlarged 10 years later, featured a swimming pool, gym, auditorium, bowling alleys, health club, and 68 dormitory rooms for men.

In keeping with the Y's mission to provide physical and educational opportunities to young men, especially from the working class, the Y offered free "worthy boy" memberships to a score of Pottstown youth every year.

One such recipient was Robert P. Smith, whose widowed mother, Amanda, baked pies to support the family.

When Robert was named manager of the YMCA cafeteria at the age of 17, he began selling his mother's pies at the lunch counter. Sales grew quickly and soon Robert was selling his mother's pies in local restaurants and grocery stores.

Within ten years, Mrs. Smith's Delicious Home Made Pies Inc. operated two factories producing pies delivered fresh daily on 47 routes throughout southeastern Pennsylvania.

Mrs. Smith's developed a method to produce and deliver frozen pies in the

early 1950s. A nationwide distribution network followed.

By 1976, when the Smith family sold the company to the Kellogg Corp. for \$56 million, Mrs. Smith's was the largest pie maker in the country.

Robert P. Smith never forgot the YMCA, which he credited for his success. Smith and his family have donated millions of dollars to the Y over the decades.

"My grandfather contributed to many charities," said Stephanie Smith Mitchell, "but none was as dear to his heart as the Y.

"The Y helped him succeed in life, and he wanted to give that same chance to other boys and girls. No other local charity helped youth in poverty escape their environment, interact with other kids, develop leadership skills, and become mature, caring adults.

"That's what the Y is all about, and what my grandfather wanted to preserve." Mitchell said that for decades, "there was never a year he didn't give at least \$200,000 to the Pottstown YMCA."

Others helped expand the Y's services, such as Dr. Carol Henwood, who led the fundraising effort to build a \$1 million heated pool at the Pottstown Y in the late 1990s.

She wanted to enable patients with ailments such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, and arthritis to exercise in the pool.

But the current administration closed the heated pool last year to save money.

Friday: Has the YMCA forgotten its mission?



Commentary by
Thomas Hylton



ORIGINAL YMCA BUILDING was constructed at King and Evans streets in 1913. An annex was added in 1922. The facility contained a swimming pool, gym, auditorium, bowling alleys, cafeteria, men's health club, and 68 dormitory rooms for men. The current YMCA was built in 1969.