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# Sharing Katie's commitment

Community support helps the Family Y stay on track with its adaptive aquatics center plan

By Scott Michaux | Staff Writer

Sunday, March 01, 2009

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The economic downturn hasn't stopped the filling up of Katie's Pool.



Special

Named in memory of Miss York, the proposed Kathryn M. York Adaptive Aquatics Center would offer water therapy programs for special-needs children and adults.

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The fundraising efforts to build the adaptive aquatics center at the Wilson Family Y in memory of Katie York has crossed the halfway mark, and the board remains committed to getting the project started before the year is out.

"I am absolutely confident that we will break ground in 2009 and open it in 2010," said Danny McConnell, the president of the Family Y in Augusta.

The momentum to build the adaptive aquatics center took off last summer after the death of Miss York, a former Augusta Christian Schools swimmer. After recovering from viral encephalitis that left her coping with seizures, Miss York became an inspiration to the special-needs

children she worked with every day through the water therapy programs at the Family Y.

In the first week after Miss York died of seizures May 20, a movement to build the specialized pool she was so passionate about generated \$500,000 in donations. The fundraising has reached \$870,000 -- just more than half of the \$1.7 million price tag for the facility.

That figure doesn't include another donation committed this week of more than \$200,000 to build the parking lot that will serve the new pool in addition to the athletic fields behind the Family Y.

"The economy has had an impact on fundraising, but I couldn't be more pleased with the support we are getting," said Mr. McConnell, who is pursuing several grants to push the project closer to its goal. "We all want to see this thing get started and built."

That donations continue to come in is considered a testament to the generous spirit of the local community and remains a source of comfort for the York family.

"God wants this pool to get built," said Melrose York, Katie's mother.

One source that touched the family was a senior at Greenbrier High School who has raised \$5,700 for the cause as part of her senior project.

Allie Howard, 17, wrote her senior paper on the effects of encephalitis, and her research reintroduced her to Miss York's inspirational story. Katie York was a friend of Allie's older brother, Ben, and a fellow member of Trinity on the Hill United Methodist Church.

Wanting to do more than just turn in a project for a grade, Allie decided to follow Miss York's example.

"If someone with a disease can put on a smiling face and help others, then why can't I?" Allie said. "I wanted to do something that would have a lasting impact."

Allie organized a fundraising dinner at her church Jan. 29, inviting family, friends and fellow members to the \$40-a-plate affair. The response went beyond those who attended, and she raised \$5,700. She presented the donation check for Katie's Pool to the Family Y on Friday.

"It's indescribable that this small project is going to help so many people," Allie said. "Looking at that building will remind me that even small people can play a part in something big."

It is a fitting tribute to Miss York, who was determined to help make the pool a reality to serve the autistic children and other special-needs swimmers to

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whom she was devoted before her death at age 20.

Mr. McConnell said the board voted unanimously Monday to do whatever it takes to break ground on the facility this year.

The proposed Kathryn M. York Adapted Aquatics Center will house a saltwater system pool that will be kept at a temperature of 88 to 90 degrees. The nonchlorine environment can serve a larger and more diverse group of disabled clients, from stroke victims to veterans suffering from traumatic injuries. There is no comparable facility in the region.

"I've got some things lined up so that as soon as the pool's built we'll have some programs going there," said Claudia Collins, the adaptive aquatics coordinator at the Family Y.

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**KATIE'S STORY**

Katie York stood out as an athlete and student as a junior at Augusta Christian Schools.


A member of the Aiken-Augusta Swim League for 10 years, she was named all-state in the Georgia Independent Scholastic League in 2003-04 and won a 2004 state title in the 100-meter backstroke. Her coaches presented her with an award for being "an example for all swimmers to follow."

In 2005, Miss York was stricken with viral encephalitis then uncontrollable seizures. After lengthy hospital stays, Miss York eventually returned home and was able to graduate from high school. Despite continued seizures, she went on to help with the Family Y's adaptive aquatics program, which helps children with autism and other disabilities. She continued to do so until her death May 20, 2008.

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Misses York and Howard offer wonderful examples of concerned citizenship for our young folks and our older folks, too, to emulate.

Posted by [Craig Spinks](#) on Sun Mar 1, 2009 8:21 AM 

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