

experiences you might just have at the Playhouse this season. And please stay until the end. Great play, great performances, great peppermint patties from Newman's Own.

Rozanne Gates  
Westport

## Y plan will benefit Westport

Our family moved to Westport in August 2006 from Newton, Mass. As there are many wonderful towns in the Fairfield County area, we decided to rent before buying a house. We initially rented in Westport because we were impressed with the town's commitment to community and distinctive stand-alone history.

We were particularly thrilled to see the new Staples High School because Newton, a town also known for its vibrant community, struggled for years to agree where and how to renovate and/or build one of its high schools for a projected cost of \$60 million in 1995. Newton recently broke ground on the project that is now expected to cost \$187+ million. The school's exorbitant price tag, including years of pre-construction "studies," however, has impacted Newton's ability to provide "extras" such as teacher math training, musical instrument instruction, and foreign language programs in its elementary schools.

As the moving trucks pulled out of our rental's driveway, I called the Y to see what programs were still available during the last few weeks of the summer and the coming school year. I wanted all three of my children to get busy developing a sense of their new "home." I was also concerned that my five-year-old wasn't swimming as well as she should given all the water based activity nearby. Programs for my daughters were still running, so I brought them that day to the Y.

In just a few days, my younger daughter had met one of her dearest friends in Westport — the friend turned out to be in her kindergarten class and was also signed up for the same Y swimming and gymnastic classes in the fall. My older daughter, a gymnast-aholic, came home chatting about her new Westport, Weston and Fairfield County friends and also joined the Y's "pre" Showtime gymnastics team, which performs its dance with gymnastics shows at homes for the elderly, disabled, and those with special learning needs. This year, she joined the Y's gymnastics team, and thanks to the Y, her sister now swims very well. My 11-year-old son has loved improving his basketball skills and making friends at the Y in Westport's only three season basketball clinic.

The Y has been our lifeline to developing roots here — and we have used just a few of the many important four season services that the Y, and only the Y, provides to Westport's community. Although we rented and looked actively in the Mahackeno area of town, in May we bought a house near Coleytown Elemen-

tary School. Our decision to buy a house and make Westport our home may have been different if we had been hauling our children back and forth to another town's Y/community center.

As a newcomer to town, it seems to me that Westporters agree that the Y needs better facilities (including parking and traffic flow) to keep its outstanding community efforts thriving. In addition to running a deficit, being energy inefficient, and in need of too many costly repairs, the Church Lane facility has not even been accessible to all members of the community, let alone conducive to the best competitive performance of the different athletic teams. I reviewed the history of the Y's search for a suitable property downtown, and basically there isn't one available. Furthermore, the Y has sold and is now renting this facility; therefore, it already has a majority of the funds needed to build a new Y.

It is short-sighted not to encourage the Y to use its private funds to build its planned Westport facility on its privately owned land and thereby disperse Westporters of all ages to community centers in other towns. For those of us who care about Westport's lovely green space, the environmentally vetted facility and parking area will be built in the back, Merritt Parkway side corner on less than 25% of the Y's 32-acre Mahackeno property. Counterbalancing Longshore's location along the coastal border of Westport, the new facility will be slightly closer to those who live on the north/western side of town, but out of the residential, yet heavily trafficked, North Avenue "schools zone."

The Y's completion of its Robert Stern, beautifully planned and designed facility will help keep Westport's COMMUNITY AND PROPERTY VALUES STRONG WELL INTO THE 21ST CENTURY!

Claire Hertan, Westport  
(The author joined the Westport/  
Weston Y's Board of Directors  
in January 2008.)