

Wonderful environment

I've been attending gymnastics lessons at the YMCA since I was two years old.

It has been a wonderful environment in which to grow up. I made tons of friends, and spent many hours weekly learning in that gym. As I grew older I became more advanced and became aware of the types of tricks and levels I could ultimately work up to. I saw high school girls who were doing floor routines and difficult stunts on beam. I was a part of an exhibition team called "Showtime" where we would combine dance and gymnastics into great routines, with stunts that made our audiences cheer. We performed at the Senior Center, the Danbury Mall, the apple festivals, and many other events including our summer trips to places like Sea World, Arizona, and recently, Austria.

To improve our gymnastics and gain experience working with highly trained coaches, we traveled to Chelsea Piers every year. When I went inside Chelsea Piers for the first time, the equipment available and the size of the facility amazed me. There were two floors of tumble tracks, soft pits, trampolines, rings and three sets of bars. Within a couple of hours girls were improving their skills and trying things they could never try at the YMCA. I began to see the talent that these girls possessed, but that our small gym was holding them back. As girls advanced they wanted to try things like Giants on the bars, but they couldn't because they would scrape their toes on the ceiling.

Slowly girls who really wanted to advance would leave to study at private gyms. We couldn't hold home meets in our gym because it was so small that it would be a fire hazard to hold all of the people. Every year

we gave up girls who wanted to stay, but couldn't because they wanted to improve but they didn't have the equipment to help them. The new Mahackeno site will provide all the necessities for aspiring gymnasts. The YMCA gym has a sense of community. It isn't as competitive as some of those tough private gyms and gives kids flexibility. They get to improve their skills in a comfortable environment with encouraging coaches. I would run down from gymnastics to dance every Saturday morning, and it was so helpful to have both things I love in the same building, where else could you get that but the Y. In the summers the gymnastics center holds camps where kids do gymnastics in the morning and then go swimming in the afternoon; at a regular gym you don't have that luxury.

The New Mahackeno can get kids to that level, while keeping them in a safe and fun environment. Without your support of Mahackeno we won't have a Y anymore. We have looked at all the possibilities. As a member of the board, I have seen first hand how hard everyone has worked to create Mahackeno so that it is even better than the Y downtown. From a girl who has spent most of her childhood at the Y I would be devastated to lose it. The Y has done so much for me, and I am sure that it has done something for you. Whether that is learning how to swim, playing basketball on a Saturday morning, jamboree lessons when you were a kid or just going to work out at the gym. Westport will be losing a big part of our community if we lose the YMCA.

Please, let's not let that happen. Make Mahackeno happen!

*Maggie Feakins
11th grade
Staples High School*