

Letters to the Editor

continued from page A8

The Importance Of the Family Y

I am writing this because I am a member of the Westport Weston Family Y. I am also a graduating senior member of the Water Rat swim team. I have been on the swim team for 11 years, almost the entire time I have been in school. Both the Family Y and the swim team have been very important in my life. The Y became my second home and the Water Rats became my second family. Frankly, I can't imagine what my life would be like without either of them.

The YMCA taught me about responsibility, respect, caring and honesty. But the Y didn't teach just me. Those values truly are reflected in every member of the swim team and every youth member of the Family Y. I know I have been shaped by those values and I have formed bonds that will last a lifetime.

I know that this does not seem to have anything to do with the Y's application to build at Mahackeno. It has everything to do with Mahackeno because I respect the leaders of the Y. I believe them when they tell me that we need a new YMCA in Westport.

Actually, I can see that with my own eyes. If you stand at the lobby of the Y and watch a senior citizen try to climb the stairs to the fitness center, you'll see it too. If you came to the Y this winter and felt the chill when the boiler wasn't working, you'd feel it too. Our YMCA is very old and we need a new one.

Like all the current high school kids on the swim team, I'll never get to use the new Y — unless I use it when I come home from

college. But I would like to know that today's first graders will have a place to go during the next 11 years.

I think that all the kids in Westport should have an opportunity to know what it is like to belong to a second family for 11 years.

When I go to swim practice I feel an energy coming from the pool. That energy is not just physical, it's emotional too. You develop a camaraderie when you spend every afternoon with teammates.

I know that many people will think that I want the approval of Mahackeno because of the swim team. I don't. I want Mahackeno approved because I want to save the Y. I want to see the Y continue to mold children into caring, responsible, respectful and honest adults. I would not be who I am today without the Y and I don't want anyone else to miss out on the experiences I had.

In all honesty, why can't a new Y be built? The Y just wants to build on land it has owned for decades.

I don't envy the committee having to decide. But when the final decision is made I hope that the committee and the town think about my 11 years as a member of the Westport Y. I hope that it will be decided that other kids deserve 11 years, too.

**KATIE MANN
WESTPORT**