



Patented

A trademark view of the news of Madison's many communities.

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YWCA: A century of empowering women, girls

Pat Schneider —

First there were Jean and Lorraine. Then Holly. Then Aurealia.

They are just of a handful of local women whose lives have been changed by the Madison YWCA, which celebrated its 100th birthday at its annual Circle of Women fundraising lunch Tuesday.

The pretty-tasty chicken lunch and taped birthday greetings from such big names as Gov. Jim Doyle and Mayor Dave Cieslewicz and smaller names who work behind the scenes to do good for the community was fun. (The comically operatic rendition of "Happy Birthday" by Steve Goldberg, executive director of the CUNA Mutual Group Foundation, was a hoot.)



But what really sent a message to me was the story of how the YWCA's mission to women changed with the times from advocatin gworkplace rights and social consciousness in the early 20th century, through promoting life skills growth for women and families in crisis, to empowering girls to master the challenges of adulthood in the early 21st century.

As CEO Eileen Mershart told the hundreds of friends and supporters gathered at the Alliant Energy Center: "The YWCA is about harnessing the potential of people, especially women."

Jean Bricknow and Lorraine Orchard, now in their 90s, participated in a YWCA program on the UW-Madison campus in the 1930s. The program stressed building broader social relationships (sounds like networking to me) and service to the community.

"It was the only women's organization," Bricknow said. "It was the place to be."

Holly Sanborn and her family got a chance to pull themselves out of homeless shelters and into permanent housing and secure finances a few years ago through the Second Chance Apartment Project. That program teams a family with a local church or community organization that agrees to fund housing and mentor the family for two years.

"For the first time in a long time we are optimistic about our future," Sanborn said.

Aurealia Johnson, 16, (pictured here) participates in Girls Inc., a program that prepares teen girls to take risks and meet the emotional, physical and academic challenges their lives present. "I'm learning to make smart choices for myself. I've got big plans," she said. "You can help other girls like me achieve their dreams."

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