

## Significant Leadership Gift Propels Valparaiso YMCA toward its Vision of a New Facility



*Pictured, left to right: Deb Koeppen, Financial Development Director; Rick Urschel, Capital Campaign Committee; Bob Wanek, CEO; Karen Vogelsang, Capital Campaign Committee Chair*

### About Valparaiso Family YMCA

*The Valparaiso Family YMCA serves both Valparaiso, Indiana, and the surrounding townships with a collective population of more than 60,000. The “Y” currently has over 6,000 members and provides programming for roughly 12,000 participants—20% of the population—a rate five times the YMCA national average.*

### The Challenge

Since its initial construction in 1951, the Valparaiso Family YMCA facility has undergone four major renovations and expansions to keep up with membership growth. With the changing demographics of this growing and diverse community, the YMCA once again faced a need to expand and make improvements. Accessibility issues in the current facility were proving problematic, especially for the elderly and members with special needs. More fitness as well as meeting space was also required to support new programming demands.

### The Opportunity

Early on, an exploratory committee ruled out another renovation, due to inadequate land at the existing downtown location and the high costs of maintaining and renovating a structure that was essentially a mixture of previous efforts. When discussions turned toward exploring new locations, conversations were renewed with a local business owner who had previously offered to donate land.

The committee was encouraged to learn that the business owner had several viable options for hosting the new facility. Although a specific location was not immediately identified, with an early commitment to provide land, the committee was eager to proceed with plans for a new 85,000-square-foot facility. Enthusiasm ran high, but leaders were leery that the volunteers and staff of the YMCA could pull off such a tremendous effort without some fundraising assistance.



S U D D E S  
p a r t n e r s

[www.suddespartners.com](http://www.suddespartners.com)



*“The feedback we get consistently is people are impressed with the presentation—the story boards, the marketing collateral and what we have to say...it is unique to have Suddes Partners on these calls, and it has definitely energized our fundraising success.”*

## The Search

“Based on my past experience, I knew that we didn’t have the resources to maximize our fundraising efforts internally,” said Bob Wanek, CEO of the Valparaiso Family YMCA. “We needed structure and consistency, as well as expert guidance.”

The YMCA had held fundraising campaigns in 1990 for a gym and in 1998 for a teen center. “I would not consider either of these successful campaigns,” said Wanek. In both situations, it had to borrow to make up the shortfall.

Through recommendations from other YMCAs, five potential fundraising firms were identified; three were asked to present. It was during the due diligence research of the three firms that the Valparaiso YMCA learned about Suddes Partners.

“One of our committee members called another YMCA in Indiana, to ask about a firm it had used a decade or so ago,” Wanek explained. “They mentioned they had since been working with Suddes Partners and explained their delight in the firm’s innovative processes and leadership.

“So we brought in Suddes Partners and John Suddes explained the difference—including how they participate in prospect meetings, ensuring a consistent approach and follow-up,” he continued. “We were really impressed by the firm’s level of professionalism and confidence—so we awarded them the contract.”

## The Process

Suddes Partners began with a feasibility assessment in the spring of 2006, which revealed that only \$3-5 million could be raised from within the community, unless a major donor was willing to make a significant lead gift.

Realizing that this figure was much less than they needed to construct an entire new facility in a single phase, the YMCA team and Suddes Partners began planning out the different options for producing the facility in phases in order to still meet their goals.

“Suddes Partners helped us build a business plan and pro forma budget based on a \$5 million facility, including utilization of our current building,” said Wanek. “But all the while, Wade Hughes [Executive Vice President of Suddes Partners] was buffering our discussions with the reminder that the number could be quite different if we were able to get a big up-front gift.”

To this end, Suddes Partners began working with the YMCA to develop a strategy to approach the handful of entities—families as well as organizations—that were identified during the Assessment as potential partners. The firm provided counsel and support as those prospects were approached.

“The Urschel family had already committed over a million dollars in land to the YMCA, but we went back to them because we heard the family felt strongly about having two pools and that’s a \$7.5 million undertaking,” said Wanek.

Hughes accompanied Wanek on this visit, along with the YMCA’s CFO, the board chairman and several attorneys.

*“Each time I get to tell [other YMCA’s] that with out the aggressive support of Suddes Partners, there is no way that we would have been able to make this happen.”*



S U D D E S  
p a r t n e r s

“I’ll never forget this meeting. Wade was explaining what it would cost to get these two pools and then he is silent,” recounted Wanek. “I received a call from Bob Urschel the following week and he said he would give the \$7.5 million to get the pools.”

This donation brought the cash pledge to \$7.5 million and gave the YMCA the lead gift it needed to propel the campaign toward its ultimate vision.

Shortly thereafter, a specific location for the new YMCA was identified that further sweetened the deal. A movie theater had pulled out of Cumberland Crossing, a new mixed-use, village-style complex in suburban Valparaiso, and the YMCA was presented with the opportunity to become the new anchor.

The estimated 2,000 daily visitors to the YMCA would deliver the traffic that the complex’s developer needed. In turn, the site would provide more than enough space to accommodate all of the YMCA’s new programming requirements, in a location that would be more easily accessible for the growing community.

## The Results

Campaign volunteers quickly learned that momentum flows from the first major gift. With a \$7.5 million lead gift plus a land donation in place, the YMCA team was able to present a much more compelling ask. The team began visiting the next top 150 donors, reaching 70 in the first three months.

Although the campaign isn’t complete yet, Cumberland Crossing—home to the new Valparaiso YMCA – is scheduled to break ground late this summer.

“We have an urgency not typical to other projects to make this happen,” said Wanek.

Normally, YMCAs raise money based on a vision, and then decide what to build based on what they have raised. However, the Valpo Y’s situation is unusual, as the success of the development is dependent on the success of this YMCA. That’s why having a clear vision, and a strong plan from the start, were so critical to its fundraising capabilities. The response it has seen thus far gives every indication the Y will be able to reach its \$15 million goal.

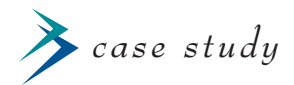
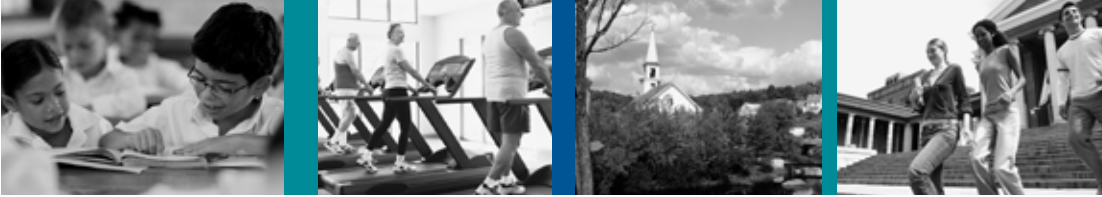
“The feedback that we get consistently is that people are impressed with the presentation—the storyboards, the marketing collateral and what we have to say,” said Wanek. “It’s unique to have Suddes Partners on these calls, and it has definitely energized our fundraising success.”

“We structured the entire effort so the Y avoided the risk of going out with a campaign that is not achievable,” explained Wade Hughes of Suddes Partners. “Due to their confidence in the project, people are giving exponentially larger gifts than they have in that community before.”

“Wade is an intuitive person so if one thing isn’t working, he’s always looking for other opportunities,” said Wanek. “It doesn’t always end with the ask. ‘Are there gifts in kind? Gifts of land?’ We just received \$450,000 in land gifts through the campaign.”

Word travels fast. Wanek is receiving inquiries from other YMCAs, asking about its selection process and calling to find out how things are going.

“Each time, I get to tell them that without the aggressive support of Suddes Partners, there is no way that we would have been able to make this happen,” he concluded.



## What's Inside?

The new Valparaiso Family YMCA facility will be a one-stop shop where every member, regardless of age or athletic ability, will have an opportunity to participate in enrichment activities, including age-appropriate programs, recreation and social events.

Plans call for an 85,000-square-foot, one-level facility—providing ample space and access for everyone. An outline of the new facility follows:

- State-of-the-art fitness and wellness center
- Warm water therapy and recreational pool
- Outdoor pool and splash pad
- Aerobics/multipurpose exercise studio (2nd mezzanine level)
- Indoor adult and family gymnasiums
- Indoor walking/running track (2nd mezzanine level)
- Youth fitness area
- Child watch area
- Expanded and specialized locker room facilities
- Expanded accommodations for preschool, before & after-school and kindergarten programs
- Large parking lot with child drop-off area
- Expanded staff facilities
- Space for outdoor recreational activities
- Gathering/social area



1050 Crown Pointe Parkway, Suite 1550  
Atlanta, Georgia 30338

770.698.0007 phone  
770.698.9690 fax

[www.suddespartners.com](http://www.suddespartners.com)