

# 100 1907-2007

## Where it All Began

### How it all Began and Where: The Central YWCA

In the early 1900s, Bishop J.M. Horner of the Episcopal Church became concerned about the lack of a home for young women coming to Asheville to find employment. He, along with Captain Thomas W. Patton, began working with Mrs. Haywood Parker, Miss Florence Stephenson, Mrs. Thomas Patton, Mrs. H.E. Hilliard, Mrs. Fannie Patton, Miss Adeline Orr, Mrs. Charity Craig, Miss Annie Barnard, and Mrs. M.L. Stevens, and together they launched a plan to address this need in Asheville.



"The Henrietta," postcard, 1919

"The Henrietta" building, located at 68 Biltmore Avenue, opened as a "Boarding House for Self-Supporting Women" and was the first location of the Young Women's Christian Association of Asheville (YWCA of Asheville).

Their efforts culminated in 1906 with the purchase of the Patton mansion named "The Henrietta." In 1920 the YWCA boarding house moved briefly to the Cherokee Inn on the corner of Woodfin and Oak and then to the Platt House on 52 Merrimon Avenue. In each of these locations, the focus of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) was to provide dormitory rooms for young women coming to Asheville to find work.



52 Merrimon Avenue, 1900s.

A new epoch for the YWCA began in 1924 when 13 Grove Street opened as a furnished community center for girls and women. Since funds were not on hand at that time to erect both a community center and a dormitory, the board of directors determined that the need for a facility for activities was of higher priority. This facility was built

to offer girls and women of Asheville the best "spiritual, educational, recreational, and physical opportunities," and included a gymnasium, locker room, several classrooms for meetings or activities, and an expansive lobby. In 1927, a swimming pool was added on the lowest floor.



13 Grove Street. Copyright 1970, Asheville, NC Citizen-Times. Reprinted with permission.

In 1934, The Moorhead House opened on 23 Grove as a suitable home for young women coming to the city to work. It housed 46 young women—32 as permanent residents and 14 as transients. The YWCA operated this building as a boarding house until the mid-1960s.

The Grove Street facilities served as the Central YWCA of Asheville for several decades. From dances and vocational discussions to community meetings and swim meets, thousands of women saw the YWCA on Grove Street as their place to connect, learn, exercise, and serve.



13 Grove Street, 1949. [0658] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

On the main floor of 13 Grove Street was a lobby and an office. Off the lobby there was a balcony overlooking the gymnasium below. On the basement floor, in addition to the gymnasium, there were showers, locker rooms, a kitchen, a large dining room, physical director's office, and examination room. On the upper floor were offices and club rooms.

In the late 1960s, the National YWCA communicated to the YWCA of Asheville board of directors that it did not support renovating the Grove Street facility due to the high cost of the needed improvements. The board suggested that Grove Street merge with the Black South French Broad Avenue branch. After much discussion and controversy, the YWCA board voted in 1970 to close 13 Grove Street and consolidate all YWCA services, and move to 185 South French Broad Avenue.



YWCA Moorhead House, 23 Grove Street, 1949. "This was to serve as a lounging place for members, out of town tourists and country folks shopping for the day" (Asheville, NC Citizen-Times), [0557] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Moorhead House, 23 Grove Street, 1965. [0595] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

Moorhead House residence hall was made possible by a \$100,000 bequest of Samuel E. Moorhead, father of Mrs. Charles Bryant who was president of the YWCA board during that period. Located on the main floor of the Moorhead House were the lobby, two parlors, a library, office, and dining room. On the first floor below were service rooms such as a kitchen, laundry, and powder room. The third and fourth floor were the bedrooms and large baths for the young women.

**eliminating racism  
empowering women**  
ywca

ywca of asheville



a century of empowerment

# 1907-2007

## Eliminating Racism at the YWCA

### Eliminating Racism at the YWCA

While the YWCA of Asheville can be proud of being one of the early voices in Asheville calling for racial justice and improved race relations, the association has had its fair share of struggle around race. As YWCA committees trumpeted integration and racial justice in the community, they also had to address racism within the organization itself.

National YWCA policy dictated that there was to be only one YWCA in each city. Thus, a Negro YWCA, such as the Phyllis Wheatley association in Asheville, was mandated to be affiliated as a branch under the authority of a White association. While this was the mandate, the Phyllis Wheatley branch in fact functioned as a separate entity, carrying its own administrative budget and owning its own property.



Women at international event at the YWCA, 1955. [0623] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

This independence was not called into question until the Community Chest, forerunner to the United Way, began exerting financial stipulations that required the Central YWCA (White) to begin exercising control over the Phyllis Wheatley branch. There was resistance to the idea, but the Community Chest had the last word and in 1929 withheld partial funding from Phyllis Wheatley, severely impacting its wellbeing. By 1936 all Community Chest funding was withheld. Tensions were heightened when the Phyllis Wheatley leadership rejected a list of recommendations from the Central YWCA regarding governance and oversight.

Consequently, Phyllis Wheatley was formally severed as a YWCA branch on February 6, 1936. In June 1938, by agreeing to conform to the Central YWCA's



Phyllis Wheatley women: Willie Moore, D. Glenn, Mrs. Brown, Lucille P. Burton, E. Dailey, J. Few, H. Swan, 1950s. [0626] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

recommendations, Phyllis Wheatley became a YWCA branch again and was also reinstated as a Community Chest funded organization.

Despite this rough going early on, there were indications of cooperation and communication between the Central YWCA and Phyllis Wheatley. Early records indicate that the Central YWCA board of directors appointed one of its members as liaison officer to the Negro branch. And in 1935, Phyllis Wheatley hosted round table discussions on "Better Inter-Racial Understanding" to improve relations between the two entities.

In 1954, the election of Lucille Burton—the first Negro member of the Central YWCA board of directors—put the YWCA on the path towards integration. Inroads were also being made in the youth programs. Pat Larsen, Y-Teens director at the Central YWCA, worked with Arnie Johnson, Phyllis Wheatley Y-Teens Director, to create joint ventures in the early 1950s.

When the YWCA's biracial Public Affairs Committee began advocating for racial justice and integration of workplaces and schools, their public efforts required the YWCA to examine its own house. In 1963, the YWCA board of directors passed a motion to "accept all women and girls regardless of race or creed in all facilities, programs, and services of the YWCA." The most controversial aspect of the action directed the Central YWCA's boarding facility, Moorhead House, to accept Negro residents. Integrating Moorhead House proved to be a courageous step by the YWCA board because it meant alienating one of its largest donors.

Subsequently, the YWCA leadership began taking small, strategic steps toward implementing full integration. E. Thelma Caldwell, the Black Branch Director, and the Public Affairs Committee were very thoughtful and deliberate about the process. For example, Mrs. Caldwell believed that White adults would be more accepting of integration if it started with children. Therefore, the Committee began by integrating children's swimming lessons at the White facility and paired White members of the Public Affairs Committee with Black children for these lessons.

In 1965, the YWCA of Asheville hired E. Thelma Caldwell as Executive Director over both facilities



"Foreign Delights" folk dancing at the YWCA, 1967. Photo courtesy of the YMI Cultural Center.

making her the first Black YWCA Executive Director in the South, and only the second in the USA. Membership rolls of both branches were combined in 1967, making the YWCA of Asheville the first YWCA officially to integrate in the South. Soon after that, White activities, such as the Young Wives Club, started being scheduled at South French Broad Avenue, the site of the Black YWCA. However, the activities themselves still remained primarily either all Black or all White. Also in 1967, at the South French Broad branch, the YWCA began hosting "Foreign Delights," monthly family-night dinners specifically for people to learn about other cultures. These potluck dinners usually included folk dancing and were attended by people of different racial backgrounds. Board members have emphasized the significant impact these evenings had on improving understanding across cultural divides.

In 1971, all activities and programs of the two branches of the YWCA finally came together under one roof at 185 South French Broad Avenue. Today, the YWCA is a thriving community center where people of all backgrounds feel welcome.



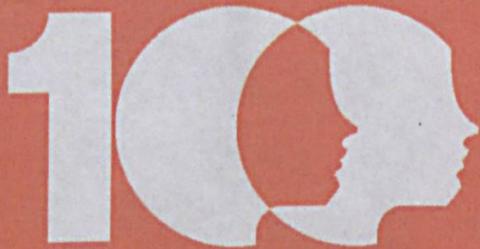
YWCA Annual Meeting, 1981. [0240] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

**eliminating racism  
empowering women  
ywca**

Sponsor: Progress Energy

[www.ywcaofasheville.org](http://www.ywcaofasheville.org)

ywca of asheville



a century of empowerment

# 1907-2007

## Eliminating Racism in Asheville

### Eliminating Racism in Asheville

In the early 1920s, a Committee on Colored Work was established in Asheville by Adela Ruffin, secretary for the Phyllis Wheatley branch of the YWCA. The committee's purpose was "to promote good feeling between the races and remove causes of friction in the community and to better the condition of Colored people." This committee was composed of three White women and three Negro women who met monthly. In 1928, this committee held a conference on race relations entitled "The Homemaker and Her Help." Although not spelled out in the original purpose of the YWCA, the work of this committee reveals that race relations were vital in the work of the YWCA very early on, and the elimination of racism has long been at the core of the YWCA's current mission.

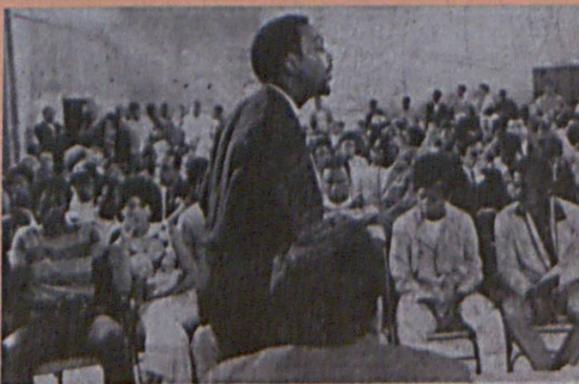


YWCA Conference, 1920s. Photo courtesy of the YMI Cultural Center.

The Public Affairs Committee (PAC) of the YWCA was the driver for the YWCA's early leadership in racial justice issues in Asheville. In preparation for desegregation of the public schools, in 1953, the YWCA PAC hosted an inter-racial forum in conjunction with the PTA Councils, Council of Jewish Women, and the United Church Women.

In 1956 Eleanor Roosevelt was invited to Asheville by the YWCA PAC to speak about the United

Nations. Mrs. Roosevelt stipulated that she would only speak to non-segregated groups. The YWCA was the only place in Asheville willing to host an integrated audience and was honored to host the former First Lady. Mrs. Roosevelt spoke to an overflowing crowd of an estimated 800 people at the Central YWCA at 13 Grove Street.



Council Hears About Problems

Copyright 1969, Asheville, NC Citizen-Times. Reprinted with permission.

Starting in 1969, the Asheville Buncombe Community Relations Council sponsored meetings and hearings at the YWCA where participants found a safe place to air concerns about employment issues, police relations, and all other racial problems facing the community.

*"The doors of the YWCA were doors anybody could walk through and feel comfortable. The YWCA was really walking the talk, not just talking."*

— Kathleen Balogh, YWCA Board President, 1988-1990

The YWCA PAC successfully lobbied the Winn-Dixie supermarket to integrate its workforce in 1962. Following this achievement, the YWCA continued its efforts to work with other local companies such as A&P, Sears, J.C. Penny's, Belk's Department Store, and Bon Marche toward the goal of an integrated workforce.

As the challenges of race relations grew in Asheville, the YWCA's leadership did not wane. The YWCA Public Affairs Committee organized a series of four workshops in 1963 entitled "The Challenge of Integration," which covered issues related to schools, jobs, and housing. Approximately 250 people attended these meetings resulting in a report with twenty recommendations to city and school officials. The recommendations included the following:

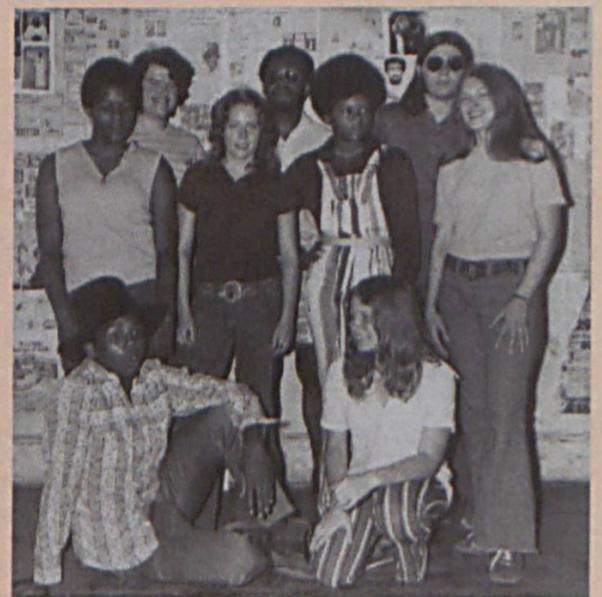
- The appointment of a qualified Negro to the city school board
- More centers for adult education, both Negro and White
- Integration of all civic groups
- Immediate integration of county schools
- Group support to Negroes applying for a transfer from a Negro school to a White school

As a direct result of these meetings, St. Joseph's Hospital pledged to integrate its nursing department. Another outcome of these meetings was the implementation of study halls at the YWCA to help Negro students prepare for eventual integration.

Executive Director E. Thelma Caldwell attended the 25th YWCA National Convention in Houston in April 1970. That historic convention issued the "One Imperative," which called the YWCA to "thrust its collective power to the elimination of racism wherever it exists and by any means necessary." This new focus for the YWCA nationwide caused both excitement and uneasiness for local associations, including the YWCA of Asheville.

Asheville. The urgency in this message was a welcome signal to Black YWCA members but felt threatening to some White YWCA members.

Mrs. Caldwell had already been working strategically with the board of directors to integrate the services of the YWCA of Asheville. In December 1970, the board voted to close the Grove Street facility, which was primarily White, and move all YWCA activities to the branch on South French Broad, which was primarily Black.



Participants in Project Aware, 1971. Photo courtesy of James McDowell.

Shortly after that, the YWCA launched one of the most significant race relations programs in Asheville. In 1971, the YWCA of Asheville received

*"Being part of that program was very fulfilling. It changed people's lives. People came away with an understanding they never had. It was hard-hitting."*

— James McDowell, Project Aware participant

a federal HUD grant to start "Project Aware," a program to facilitate better racial understanding among young adults. Through in-depth retreats, weekly discussions, and cross-cultural living experiences, a dozen youth increased

their understanding of "how the other side lives." During weekends, Whites lived with Black families and Blacks lived with White families. This program had a lasting impact on its participants.

Many women who became involved in the YWCA after integration described it as the one place in Asheville where Blacks and Whites were both involved, a place working to welcome all people.

**eliminating racism  
empowering women**  
ywca

Sponsor: New Morning Gallery

[www.ywcaofasheville.org](http://www.ywcaofasheville.org)

ywca of asheville



a century of empowerment

# 1907-2007

## E. Thelma Caldwell & the YWCA Boosters

### E. Thelma Caldwell

In the past one hundred years, the YWCA of Asheville has been privileged to have some outstanding, committed executive leadership. In the first century of service, thirty-seven women have held this position. Perhaps the most significant YWCA Executive Director of the century was E. Thelma Caldwell.



E. Thelma Caldwell, 1970s. [0706] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

E. Thelma Caldwell came to Asheville in 1961 to be the Phyllis Wheatly Branch Director. In 1965, the Central YWCA of Asheville hired her to be their Executive Director, which gave her oversight of both

the White and Black branches. This made Thelma only the second Black YWCA Executive Director in the United States and the first in the South.



E. Thelma Caldwell, 1981. Photo courtesy of the YMI Cultural Center.

*"A Negro executive was virtually unheard of... there was only one in the whole United States and that was in Buffalo, New York. Could it be possible to have the second one in the South, in Asheville?"*  
—E. Thelma Caldwell

Much was accomplished under Thelma's executive leadership from 1965-1975, including major building renovations to the South French Broad location, the launching of a school for teen moms, and the initiation of numerous childcare programs. The most significant accomplishment for Thelma was physical integration of the Black and White YWCAs. She was a visionary whose courage shepherded this monumental change.



E. Thelma Caldwell served as Honorary Chair of the YWCA's Capital Campaign 1999-2001.

### YWCA Boosters

After the White and Black branches consolidated, new challenges regarding race emerged for the YWCA, particularly in terms of fundraising. Determined to carry on Thelma's work, in 1976 twenty-two Black retired YWCA board members formed the YWCA Booster Club to supplement the current board's efforts and in particular to be a support to the first Black board president, Ollie Reynolds. Also during that time, several Black women of the YWCA were concerned about losing their identity in the merger. Thus, the formation of this group also addressed this need for special connection. In the early 1980s, several White women who had been very committed to the integration of the YWCA were invited to join the Boosters.



Boosters, 1990. (Seated, left to right) Marjorie Lockwood, Ruth Cannon, Jean Johnson, Lucy Harrison, Ethel Dailey, Gertrude Peterson, Llewellyn Perry (Standing, left to right) Orine Wiggins, Betty Williams, Josephine Schaeffer, Ethel White, Inez Daugherty, Una Mae Lundberg, Franklyn Owens, Erna Earle, Gladys Kennedy, Jo Flemming, Sally Bridenstine, Reba Harrison, Gussie Halliburton, Mary Parker. [0750] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Boosters, 2007. (Front row, left to right) Llewellyn Perry, Helen Edington, Mary Parker. (Back row, left to right) Bell Shipley, Gussie Halliburton, Willie Vincent, Jean Johnson, Lettie Polite, Georgia Allen, Agnes Jones. Photo by Chris Cleverger.

In addition to supporting YWCA financial needs such as purchasing business equipment, remodeling offices, and providing youth scholarships, this group of women Boosters also organized trips and developed enrichment programs.

While their initial purpose was to support the YWCA, over the years the Booster Club became a close knit group of friends, Black and White, meeting every first Wednesday at the YWCA or at a Booster's house.

*"The Booster Club originated in a spirit of loyalty and support when the request was made by Ollie Reynolds, then President of the YWCA board of directors, to her peer group, to return to more active Y support now that they were retired."*

—Mary Jane Kelly, Original Booster



Lew Perry, Julia Ray, Emily Boyce, E. Thelma Caldwell and Leona Owens, 1996. [0768] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

*"What is remarkable about this group is that it is an interracial group of friends ages 60 to 90! The YW Boosters do not provide programs or services around diversity. They are simply and profoundly living testaments to a vision of a multicultural community, a beloved community, a community of women who pray for each other, send get well cards to each other, party together, even travel together."*

—Holly Jones, YWCA Executive Director 1996 –

**eliminating racism  
empowering women**  
ywca

Sponsor: SunTrust Bank

[www.ywcaofasheville.org](http://www.ywcaofasheville.org)

ywca of asheville



a century of empowerment

1907-2007

# Nurturing Children

## Childcare

Throughout its history, the YWCA of Asheville has responded to the changing needs of women in the community. The importance of childcare to women's economic and physical health became evident as early as the 1940s when the YWCA Young Wives Club began offering group childcare during its meetings. The service expanded in the



YWCA Young Wives Club, 1954. [0172] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

*"The reason girls didn't go back to school was because there was no place for them to leave their babies."*

—Jo Dunton, YWCA Program Director, 1973

1950s as the Central YWCA began offering a supervised nursery/playroom for all YWCA members who came to exercise, swim, or attend a class or meeting. The

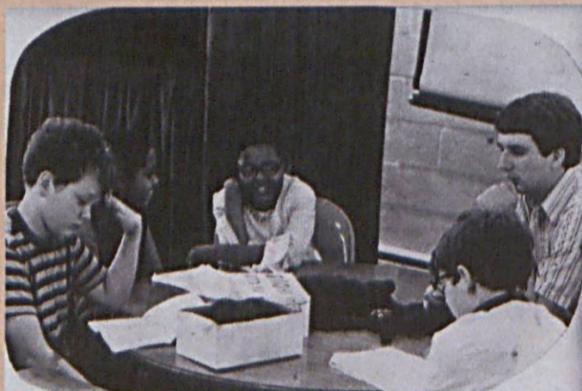
presence of this nursery drew many young mothers to the YWCA and provided a place for meeting new friends and socializing.

In 1973, the YWCA nursery services were expanded to serve the wider community when a drop-in childcare center opened its doors.

Simultaneously, the YWCA began offering childcare to the teen mothers who participated in the YWCA Continuing Education Program for young women. Even after the school system took over the program for teens, the YWCA stayed involved by offering childcare for the young moms and others in the community. In 1973, seeing the great need for such services, the YWCA sought and received a \$60,000 federal grant to form five family daycare homes, serving five children in each home.



YWCA Continuing Education Program, 1973. [0191] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Afterschool, 1970s. [0700] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

These innovative initiatives led the YWCA to open its own childcare center, in 1985, at 185 South French Broad Avenue. To facilitate childcare for all, the small facility served

children up to 5 years old whose parents worked or were in school. The YWCA Child Care Center enrolled in the state subsidy program so that eligible families could receive financial assistance and participated in a mainstreaming program to meet the needs of children with physical disabilities. Since its inception, the YWCA Child Care Center has been committed to delivering the highest quality childcare to children of all backgrounds and abilities. Over the years it has grown in both quality and size and has been recognized by the North



Childcare, 1970s. [0714] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Dance class, 1966. [0672] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804. In addition to structured childcare services, the YWCA has had an ongoing commitment to nurture children through its camps, swimming lessons and enrichment programs.

*"The YWCA was one of the few places in Asheville where our daughter could be part of a program that reflected the greater community in which we lived. At the YWCA, Emmaleigh got to know children of different races, backgrounds, cultures and physical abilities."*

—Mary Ritter, Former Board Member

Carolina licensing bureau as among the finest childcare centers in the region.

## School-Age

In 1974, with an enrollment of forty students, the YWCA began its licensed afterschool program for school-age children—the first in Asheville. The YWCA transported children from seven city and county schools to participate in arts and crafts, swimming, and field trips. To support working parents, the afterschool program opened its doors all day on snow days,

on teacher work days, and during vacations—including the long summer vacation. It was the first program in the community to offer these services. By 2006 the afterschool program was serving up to 120 students a day from thirteen schools, making it the largest such program in a single facility in Asheville. While growing to maximum capacity, the YWCA School-Age Program has expanded its mission to focus on enrichment and academic support for children through homework assistance and tutoring. Like the Child Care Center, the YWCA School-Age Program has received recognition as one of the highest quality programs of its kind in the Asheville/Buncombe area.

In 1995, the YWCA was awarded a grant by the Department of Juvenile Justice called Support Our Students (SOS). SOS is designed to offer middle-school students a positive alternative from 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm, when juvenile

crime and risky behaviors are most likely to occur. The focus of the program is to provide academic support, enrichment activities, and lively discussion on topics of concern to young adults.



School-age program, 1970s. [0035] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

From its early years, the YWCA of Asheville recognized the connection between community childcare and the empowerment of women. Carrying on that legacy, all three childcare programs sponsored by the YWCA of Asheville provide year-round support for working families by nurturing, protecting, and enriching the lives of community children.

**eliminating racism  
empowering women  
ywca**

Sponsor: Pepsi-Cola Bottling Co.

[www.ywcaofasheville.org](http://www.ywcaofasheville.org)

ywca of asheville



a century of empowerment

1907-2007

# Guiding Teens

## Guiding Teens

The YWCA of Asheville has been committed to the development of young women for one hundred years. To formalize that commitment, a chapter of Girl Reserves came together in Asheville in 1918. Girl Reserves was an international YWCA organization built on the principles of community and world service. Both the Central YWCA and the Phyllis Wheatley branch had active clubs from local high schools. In addition to their service focus, teen girls learned a code of behavior and were counseled in "how to become responsible women."



Girl Reserves, 1920s. [0611] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Y-Teens National Conference, 1950s. [0653] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Teens at the Phyllis Wheatley branch, 1950s. [0618] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

The YWCA overnight summer camp, Camp Kenjocketee, began in 1924 and served White girls from the Central YWCA through the early 1930s. The Phyllis Wheatley branch conducted a camp for Negro girls at a location near Arden. Both of these camps offered girls enrichment, independence, and community. After these camp facilities closed, both YWCAs began offering on-site day camp programs. Summer day camp for teens continues to be an energetic feature of the YWCA in the form of SPIRIT Camp, which provides service learning opportunities as well as enrichment and recreation for middle and high school students.

The Girl Reserves evolved into clubs called "Y-Teens" in the mid-1940s. Each high school had a club, which hosted dances, planned activities for children, and attended national and regional Y-Teens conferences.

The Phyllis Wheatley branch and the Central YWCA were both committed to

*"Y-Teens taught young women confidence, grace, and how to be leaders and survivors. As the local public schools integrated, the YWCA was a safe place because few understood or were prepared for the process."*  
— Jacquelyn Hallum, Y-Teens Member



Teens at the Phyllis Wheatley branch, 1950s. [0629] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

*"As a teen in the fifties, I remember walking to Phyllis Wheatley with a group of my friends to go to the Friday night dances. There was a jukebox in the gym with punch and cookies and the place was always packed."*

— Rosa Davis, Board President 1980-1983

providing teens positive opportunities to socialize and build friendships. In 1944, the Central YWCA opened a Teen Tavern that hosted dances and other activities such as ping-pong, pool, skating, and table games. Students from five local White high schools gathered at the Teen Tavern on Friday nights. The Phyllis Wheatley branch was one of the most popular places for area Negro teens to gather and have fun. The dances held at Phyllis Wheatley were well attended and much beloved. The dances at the



Teen Tavern at the Central YWCA, 1955. [0174] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Dance at the Phyllis Wheatley branch, 1950s. [0651] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

South French Broad YWCA in the late 1960s and early 1970s played a role in racial integration by providing Black and White teens a unique opportunity to socialize together.

The leadership of the YWCA concerned itself with the difficult circumstances teenagers faced, especially during the turbulent 1960s

and 1970s. Girls who had run away from home or had become pregnant found a place to turn to at the YWCA. In the early 1970s, the YWCA briefly operated a teen hotline where teens could discuss problems such as drug use, unwanted pregnancy, and suicide.

In 1969, the YWCA Public Affairs Committee recognized the need to address the fact that

pregnant teenagers were being forced to leave school. In the spring of 1970, with no funds, the YWCA started a Continuing Education Program for teen mothers. Initially there were twelve teenagers who met two days a week at the South French Broad facility with volunteer teachers. By 1973, the program was moved to the Allen Interagency Center because it had grown into a full-time school serving sixty girls, and it needed much more classroom and nursery space. By 1975, the school board policy regarding pregnant and parenting teenagers had changed, and the Asheville City Schools absorbed the YWCA Continuing Educational Program into their Optional School.

Though teen mothers eventually were allowed to attend school as mainstream students, dropout rates were high. To address this problem the YWCA again focused on pregnant and parenting

*"Young peoples' lives were touched through such efforts as tutoring assistance, helping them find employment, and preparing college applications."*  
— Phyllis Sherrill, former YWCA Program Director

teens by starting the MotherLove program in 1985. Today the successful MotherLove program supports teen mothers with a unique blend of one-on-

one mentoring and in-school and extracurricular activities designed to encourage girls to stay in school through graduation and beyond.



Teens at the YWCA, 1960s. [0057] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Study hall, 1970s. [0033] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

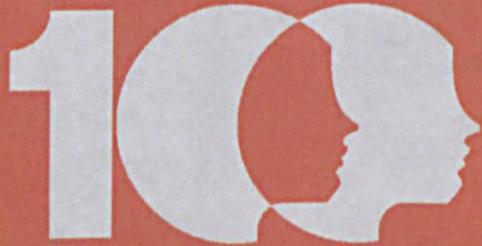
Over the years thousands of young people have received mentoring and informal job training at the YWCA. Teens were provided with opportunities for employment and often given job referrals after working with the summer camps. Today, the YWCA continues to guide teenagers in positive directions through SPIRIT Camp, MotherLove, and its middle-school program, Support Our Students (SOS).

**eliminating racism  
empowering women**  
ywca

Sponsor: Wachovia Bank

[www.ywcaofasheville.org](http://www.ywcaofasheville.org)

ywca of asheville



a century of empowerment

# 1907-2007

## Phyllis Wheatley Branch

### Phyllis Wheatley Branch

In 1913, a group of Negro women calling themselves the Employment Club began meeting on Sunday afternoons with the purpose of finding work for members and sponsoring recreational programs. Made up of participants from a girls' industrial club and members of the YMI Auxiliary, this group was sowing the seeds of the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA branch, which was the Negro YWCA branch. Some of their early meetings occurred upstairs above a pharmacy on Market Street. In 1916, under the leadership of Maggie Jones and other Negro community leaders, the Employment Club purchased a building on Market Street. During World War I, they turned this building over to the U.S. government for use by soldiers.



Adela Ruffin was the first Executive Secretary of the Phyllis Wheatley branch and served in this position from 1924-1938. She was a powerful and influential presence in the both the Negro and White communities.

After the war, the Market Street building was returned to the women and they subsequently sold it in order to purchase a house on College Street, which was the first official Phyllis Wheatley branch and formally opened on September 5, 1921. This building was located near the current approach to the Beaucatcher tunnel. Located in close proximity to the Phyllis Wheatley branch was Berry Temple



Phyllis Wheatley exterior, 1939. Copyright 1939, Asheville, NC Citizen-Times. Reprinted with permission.

United Methodist Church, John Hopkins AME Zion Church, and The Allen School for Girls, a school for Negro girls supported by the United Methodist Church.

The first floor of the Phyllis Wheatley branch was used for office and meeting rooms. The second floor served as the residence for Ms. Adela Ruffin, the Executive Secretary, and provided economical housing for Negro women seeking lodging.

By 1938, the Phyllis Wheatley residence on College and Hollywood was nearly 100 years old and structurally inadequate. An extensive building project occurred resulting in the renovation of the original structure, the creation of a residence with community space and the building of a gymnasium. This project cost \$10,000.

*"[The Phyllis Wheatley branch] filled a real need for the Negro community — it was a community within itself — all the clubs, parties, teas, and other co-ed social and educational functions were held at the Phyllis Wheatley."*

—E. Thelma Caldwell, Former Executive Director

For several decades, weekly classes, meetings, and games occurred at the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA branch. In addition to YWCA activities, many Negro groups used the facility to gather including the Red Cross Auxiliary and the Flower Guild. Important community functions also occurred at this location, such as the annual dance for N.C. Association of Black Educators. All the Negro schools in Asheville used the gymnasium for intramural games, concerts, plays, dances, and proms.

The Phyllis Wheatley branch at 360 College Street was one of the primary centers of Negro social activity in Asheville for almost forty years. In 1961, the College Street location was demolished in order to make way for an arterial street link between the east and west sides.

The Phyllis Wheatley branch briefly was housed at 194 Ashland Avenue, a former city recreation building, before moving to 185 South French Broad Avenue, home of the today's YWCA of Asheville.

The Phyllis Wheatley branch from 1939-1961 was one concrete building composed of four bedrooms upstairs (which served up to nine women); an office, lounge, club room, kitchen, and dining room downstairs; and a frame building which held a gymnasium, restrooms, hat check room, and an office.



Women outside of the Phyllis Wheatley branch, 1940s. [0656] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Phyllis Wheatley interior, 1950s. [0636] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Basketball team in the Phyllis Wheatley gymnasium, 1945. Photo courtesy of the YMI Cultural Center.

The Phyllis Wheatley YWCA branch was the only fully serviced gymnasium in the South when it was built in 1938. This gym was used by all of the Negro schools in town including Hill Street, Livingston Street, Mountain Street, Shiloh, and Stephens Lee.



Group in the Phyllis Wheatley branch, 1950s. [0649] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Phyllis Wheatley millinery class, 1961. [0682] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

**eliminating racism  
empowering women**  
ywca

Sponsor: Bank of America

[www.ywcaofasheville.org](http://www.ywcaofasheville.org)

ywca of asheville



a century of empowerment

1907-2007

S. French Broad Avenue

### South French Broad Avenue

In January 1962 at 185 South French Broad Avenue, ground was broken for a new 8,500 square foot Phyllis Wheatley YWCA branch. With a vision for the future integration of the YWCAs, Branch Director E. Thelma Caldwell initiated changing the branch name for the new location from Phyllis Wheatley to South French Broad Avenue. She believed this name change would facilitate an easier transition for the White community when integration did occur in the future.

Dedicated on December 2, 1962, the building cost \$113,000. The staff consisted of Branch Director E. Thelma Caldwell and three other staff members. The original building contained a large multi-purpose room with a fireplace, a craft and sewing room, a kitchen, a room for teenagers, offices, showers, and a conference room.



185 S. French Broad Avenue, 1970s. [0593] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

From 1962 -1967, 185 South French Broad Avenue served as the Black YWCA branch. In 1967, the YWCA associations officially became one on paper. Thus, from 1968 -1970, both Whites and Blacks participated in activities at South French Broad. In 1971, when the Grove Street location closed due to financial difficulties, the physical integration of the YWCA of Asheville was complete. All



Gymnasium, 1980s. [0101] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

YWCA services were combined at South French Broad, the newer facility. It should be noted that at the time of the merger, Whites were already using the South French Broad facility in significant numbers.



Pool, 1980s. [0304] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

For almost fifty years, prior to 1971, the YWCA had a pool and gymnasium. The move to South French Broad created a void in such activities.

However, when the South French Broad location was acquired, the plans included a future pool and gymnasium. In 1974, a campaign was launched to raise \$425,000 to add a pool and gymnasium onto the main structure.

From the 1970s through the 1990s, the YWCA on South French Broad Avenue served thousands of children, teens and women through a wide range of activities. From bellydancing classes to breast cancer support groups, and from summer day camps to Friday night teen dances, the YWCA

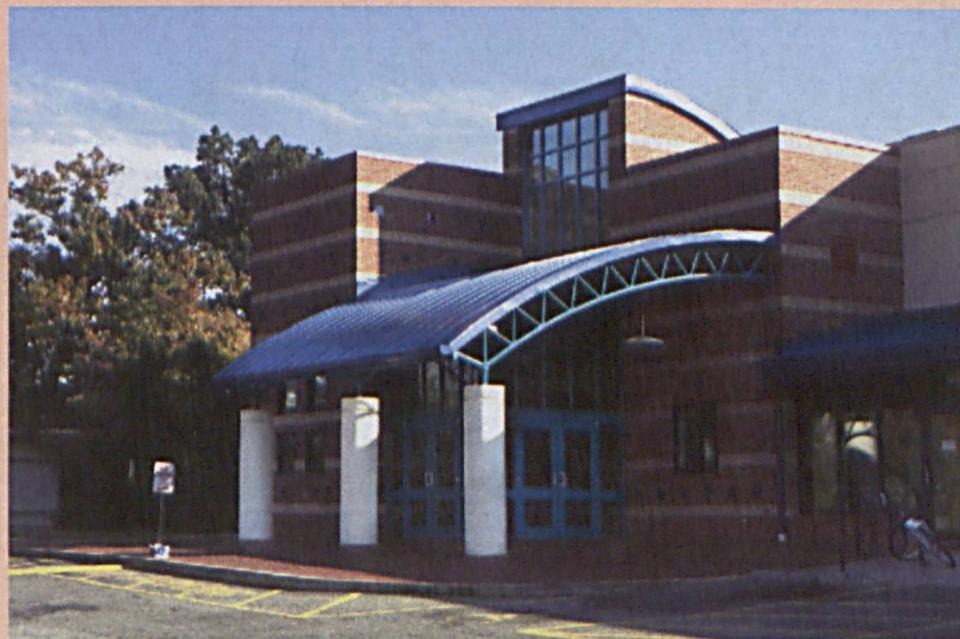


Annual Meeting in Multi-Purpose Room, 1981. [0239] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

played a vital role in many people's lives. In addition to the vast YWCA programming that occurred, the YWCA was used for numerous community meetings. People gathered for reunions and wedding receptions, and several communities of faith held worship services.

In 1999, the YWCA board of directors and a broad base group of community leaders announced an ambitious capital campaign for a major renovation and expansion of the 185 South French Broad building. The fundraising campaign raised \$3.8 million dollars from over 800 donors.

Thus, at the age of forty, after years of service in the community, the South French Broad facility was completely renovated and expanded, opening a new youth services wing and a new Health and Fitness Center, Club W.



185 S. French Broad Avenue, 2002. The renovation of the YWCA increased the square footage of the building from 23,999 to 38,437. [0755] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



In 1987, the YWCA acquired 166 S. French Broad Avenue, a two-story house across the street from 185 S. French Broad Avenue. The upstairs served as the YWCA Women's Center and the downstairs was used for afterschool activities for youth until 1995.



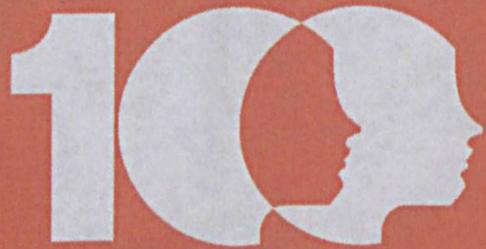
Ground breaking for renovation of 185 South French Broad Avenue, 2001. (Left to Right) Leah Karpen, E. Thelma Caldwell, Elspeth Clarke, Laurey Masterton, Holly Jones. [0758] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

eliminating racism  
empowering women  
ywca

Sponsor: Mathews Architecture

www.ywcaofasheville.org

ywca of asheville



a century of empowerment

1907-2007

# Empowering Women

## Empowering Women

For a century the YWCA of Asheville has been a safe haven, a community gathering place, and a place to exercise, but its essence has been dedicated to improving the economic wellbeing of women. One hundred years ago, a few insightful city fathers and mothers became concerned that women



Phyllis Wheatley Business and Professional Women's Club, 1951. [0684] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

coming to Asheville to find employment did not have appropriate living options. To address this concern the YWCA of Asheville was founded. On a parallel track, in that same decade, a group of Negro women were gathering. They called themselves the Employment Club and were committed to finding jobs and providing support for hard-working Negro women. They established the Phyllis Wheatley branch of the YWCA.

In addition to offering safe, affordable housing and wholesome meals for young working women from out of town, the YWCA also supported the many women living in Asheville who were seeking employment. From the beginning, the YWCA founders understood the link between the wellbeing of women and their economic success.

During the 1920s, the Phyllis Wheatley branch acted as an informal employment referral agency for Negro girls looking for work primarily in domestic services, which included hotels, boarding houses, restaurants, and private homes. Adela Ruffin, Executive Secretary of the Phyllis Wheatley branch, was viewed in the community as one of the key references for good Negro employees. One of the branch's most important committees was the



Nurses at the Phyllis Wheatley branch, 1940s. Photo courtesy of the YMI Cultural Center.

Committee on Colored Work because of the lack of employment opportunities for Negroes living in Asheville.

The Girl Reserves of Phyllis Wheatley and the Central YWCA organized classes to support unemployed girls and offer aid. The Central YWCA offered classes for unemployed women entitled "Learn While You Do Not Earn." The classes included clerking, office work, practical nursing, and "Helpful Hints on How to Get a Job and Keep It." Their purpose was to keep morale up and help participants spend their leisure time in an efficient manner. In 1932, the Girl Reserves offered classes for 200 unemployed women. The Phyllis Wheatley branch held adult classes that taught vocational skills such as care of rooms, table services, laundry work, sewing, cooking, and child nursing.

Also occurring early



Phyllis Wheatley sewing class, 1960s. [0675] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Educational program, 1970s. Photo courtesy of the YMI Cultural Center.

was the formation of committees and clubs for working women. The Phyllis Wheatley branch had the Business and Professional Women's Club. At the Central YWCA, a club was formed for young employed women, and the Business Girls' League served older women. In the 1940s, the Business Girls' League provided classes in self-improvement, social activities, and leadership opportunities.

The YWCA Women's Center was established in 1987 in collaboration with the Buncombe County Women's Commission. It was located in a house across the street from the YWCA at 166 South French Broad Avenue. Services included a resource library, workshops, and referrals. The Women's Center also had a job club for women who had been out of the workforce for some time. Education programs included "New Trends for Women in the Workforce."



"Women Mean Business" event, 1980s. [0231] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

In 1991 the YWCA launched its premier fundraising event, Tribute to Women in Industry or TWIN. The purpose of TWIN was to honor women who have made a significant contribution to business and industry in managerial and professional roles and to recognize local businesses whose personnel practices support such achievement. The event name was changed in 2005 to the Tribute to Women of Influence, to better reflect the nature of the local economy.

In 1999 the YWCA identified a growing need in the community to serve women striving for economic self-sufficiency. As a result, NEWS (now New Choices), was launched with the support of the North Carolina Department of Administration. Through case-management, access to child care, group support, and job-skills building, this program continues to serve women living below the poverty level who want to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

With program after program designed to support working women—from training for work, providing affordable child care, contributing to the workforce wellness movement, and teaching life-skills—the YWCA has been in the vanguard of the movement toward financial self-sufficiency for women.



Women's services, 1980s. [0220] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

**eliminating racism  
empowering women**  
ywca

Sponsor: CarePartners  
Health Services

[www.ywcaofasheville.org](http://www.ywcaofasheville.org)

### Health & Wellness

From its inception, the YWCA of Asheville has been committed to the physical health of the women it serves. Early on the YWCA leadership at both the Central YWCA and the Phyllis Wheatley branch understood the relationship between a woman's wellbeing and physical activity.



Camp Kenjocketee, 1920s. [0379]YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

The YWCA was a pioneer in health and fitness when it constructed 13 Grove Street to offer girls and women of Asheville the best spiritual, educational, recreational, and physical opportunities. The gymnasium gave girls and women a place to play basketball, volleyball, badminton, and other recreational games. The earliest YWCA programs for young girls such as Camp Kenjocketee and Girl Reserves included physical and recreational activities as central elements.



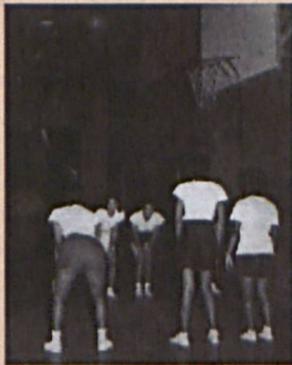
Junior Lifesaving Corps, 1920s. [0605]YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Park Girls Basketball Team, 1920s. [0613]YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

In 1927 the Central YWCA opened a pool and began extensive aquatics programming that would become renowned throughout Asheville for its excellent swimming instruction. Also in 1927 the YWCA began its long-standing relationship with the American Red Cross by offering certified swimming and lifeguarding classes. Around this same time the YWCA held the "Swim the Channel" contest, which challenged women to swim across the pool 1,760 times.

One of the earliest and most active YWCA committees was the Health Education Committee. In the 1920s and 1930s this committee scheduled lectures about health and hygiene, organized



Girls basketball at the Phyllis Wheatley branch, 1945. Photo courtesy of the YMI Cultural Center.

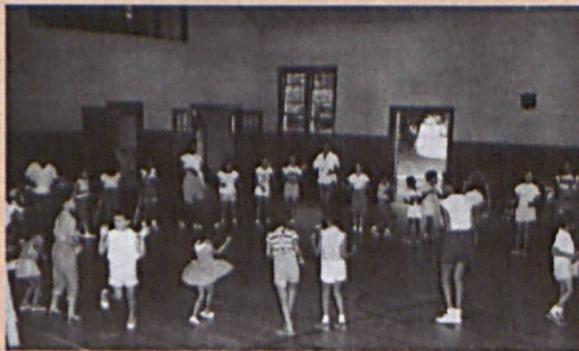


Tap dancing at Phyllis Wheatley branch, 1950s. [0644] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Women exercising at the Central YWCA, 1950s. [0655]YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

soccer. Well before the beginning of the fitness movement of the 1970s, the YWCA was offering exercise classes and even had an early fitness center called "The Sleek Salon." In 2002, Club W: The YWCA Health & Fitness Center was opened, and at the same time, physical activity was also integrated into youth and childcare programs.



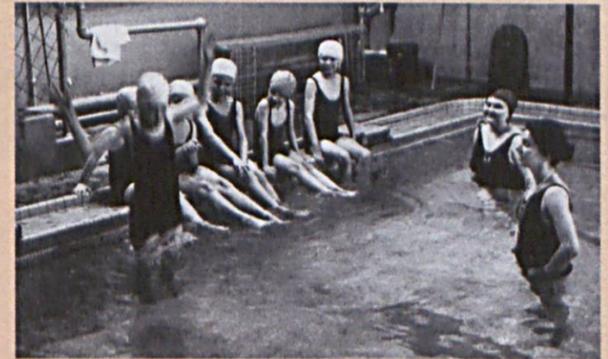
Children's games at the Phyllis Wheatley branch, 1955. [0642]YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

The YWCA has a history of providing health education to the community through nutrition classes, post-mastectomy support groups, health screenings, and its community garden. More

medical examinations for women (a requirement prior to using the pool or gymnasium), and held awareness events for the community including contests such as "Healthiest Girl in Asheville."

Recreational activities were also program highlights for girls participating at the Phyllis Wheatley branch. In fact, in 1938 the Phyllis Wheatley branch boasted the only full service gymnasium for Negroes in the South. Girls and boys from the Negro community used this facility for sports and games.

In addition to aquatics and basketball, the YWCA offered a wide range of physical fitness programs such as bellydancing, yoga, clogging, volleyball, table tennis, and



Swim class at the Central YWCA pool, 1959. [0291]YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Seniors exercise at the YWCA, 1970s. Photo courtesy of the YMI Cultural Center.

recently, the YWCA of Asheville has become committed to highlighting and addressing the racial health disparities that exist in our community. In the mid-1990s, the YWCA joined forces with Mission Hospitals and other community organizations to increase access to breast cancer screening through outreach efforts. In 2005 the YWCA began the Diabetes Wellness Program.



Gymnastics, 1980. [0163] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Health education class, 2001.

The YWCA's ongoing commitment to preventive health and community outreach makes it a leader in Asheville addressing health disparities.

**eliminating racism  
 empowering women**  
 ywca