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East Hartford Town Councilman Don Bell; Tim Larson, Secretary of Higher Education; Sharon Fitzgerald, Larson family; East Hartford Town Councilman Rich Kehoe, Council President; Susan Joyse, YMCA of Greater Hartford; Marylou Fitzgerald, Larson Family; East Hartford Mayor Marcia Leclerc; Josyah Bang; Representative Henry Genga; Brian Bang, Brian Bang, Jr.; Congressman John Larson; Representative Jason Rojas; Harold Sparrow, YMCA of Greater Hartford; Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont; Daniela Bang; Arionna Bang; Eric Clappood, YMCA of Greater Hartford Board Chair; David Larson; Ariel Robinson, East Hartford YMCA Board Chair; Laura Floyd, East Hartford YMCA; East Hartford Town Councilwoman Sebrina Wilson; East Hartford Town Councilwoman Angie Parkinson; East Hartford Town Councilman Awet Tsegai; Daniel Larson



Lois Nolan Larson YMCA Community Center reopens after major renovation with event featuring CT dignitaries from the East Hartford and YMCA communities

EAST HARTFORD, Conn. (July 22, 2020) -- The YMCA of Greater Hartford was honored to present the grand re-opening of the Lois Nolan Larson YMCA Community Center, a preschool in East Hartford's Mayberry Village, on Saturday, July 18.

Named after Congressman John Larson's mother, who raised her eight children in Mayberry Village where the center is located, the Larson Center has long served as a child development center, providing early childhood education in literacy, STEM, and other subject matters to 50 kids each year.

Over 1-in-4 residents of Mayberry Village are youth. After 5 years of renovations to modernize the center, the Larson Center will provide a place for those children to learn, grow, and thrive, preparing them for the ever-changing future. At the ribbon cutting, dignitaries from all walks of life in Connecticut showed up to celebrate the momentous occasion. Tim Larson, the current executive director of the Connecticut Office of Higher Education and former state senator, joined his brother Representative John Larson, their siblings, extended relatives, and many others for the ribbon cutting.

Tim Larson, who was instrumental in making this renovation happen, said at the event, "When this center was first dedicated to my mother, a dear friend of ours who we lost several months ago, Elliot Ginsberg, spearheaded this project by getting the YMCA involved in taking over and restarting programs that were here. My mother's been the guiding light for all of us, as we hope that this building continues to be. The resurrection of this place and the stories that come out of this place are just phenomenal."

Congressman John Larson added, "We were proud of the fact that we came from Mayberry Village, and that was instilled in us, as well, and as importantly that you gave back to your community. That's what the YMCA stands for, that's what they're all about, and that's why this is such an important relationship that we have."

Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont, who was in attendance, said, "It's about STEM and learning skills, but during this crisis, I've been meeting with a lot of educators, and they tell me these kids need friends again. They need to socialize, they need to get back in contact. And that's what we can do here at the community center. That's what the social and emotional learning is all about."

Harold Sparrow, president and CEO of the YMCA of Greater Hartford, said, "When I see us here today, I think about our first meeting, and all the meetings thereafter with the town, our Board, and local elected officials to plan this center. And we all came together as one to build lifelong success here, and that's one of the important things that we do at the YMCA – we take infants and toddlers, and develop their social and cognitive skills to give them a healthy start in life."



East Hartford's legislative delegation helped the YMCA secure more than \$1.7 million in state funding for this project to better Mayberry Village and help prepare children for kindergarten and beyond.

Other Connecticut dignitaries in attendance included East Hartford Mayor Marcia Leclerc, state Representative Jason Rojas, state Representative Henry Genga. In addition, the YMCA of Greater Hartford leadership team was there to support the re-opening, including CEO Harold Sparrow, Chief Development Officer Susan Joyse, Board Chair Eric Clapprood, East Hartford Executive Director Laura Floyd, and East Hartford YMCA Board Chair Ariel Robinson.

A capital campaign will continue to renovate more areas of the building for use by the community. "Reinvesting in Mayberry Village is going to become a priority in our family, as well as for all the other elected officials here," Tim Larson said. In the future, this community center will serve as a vital culturally-relevant community center of excellence that offers a continuum of services for children, families, and seniors. We will offer a safe, nurturing and supportive environment for people from all backgrounds to come together to bring about meaningful change not only within themselves, but also in their community.

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About the YMCA of Greater Hartford: Established in 1852, the YMCA of Greater Hartford is a charitable association open to all and committed to helping people develop their fullest potential in spirit, mind and body. This commitment is reinforced by our belief in living out universal values of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility. We will be the premier charitable organization, building lifelong success for all by advancing Youth Development, Healthy Living, and Social Responsibility. The YMCA of Greater Hartford provides transformative programming at 6 facility branches, 4 program branches, 2 overnight camps, a regional day camp, 7 preschool and daycare locations, and 29 school age before and after school sites, serving over 108,000 community members each year. In 2018, the YMCA of Greater Hartford provided \$2.4 million in financial assistance so that everyone in the 52 communities we serve could have access to life-saving swim lessons, life-changing summer camp, life-rebuilding cancer recovery programs, and so much more.