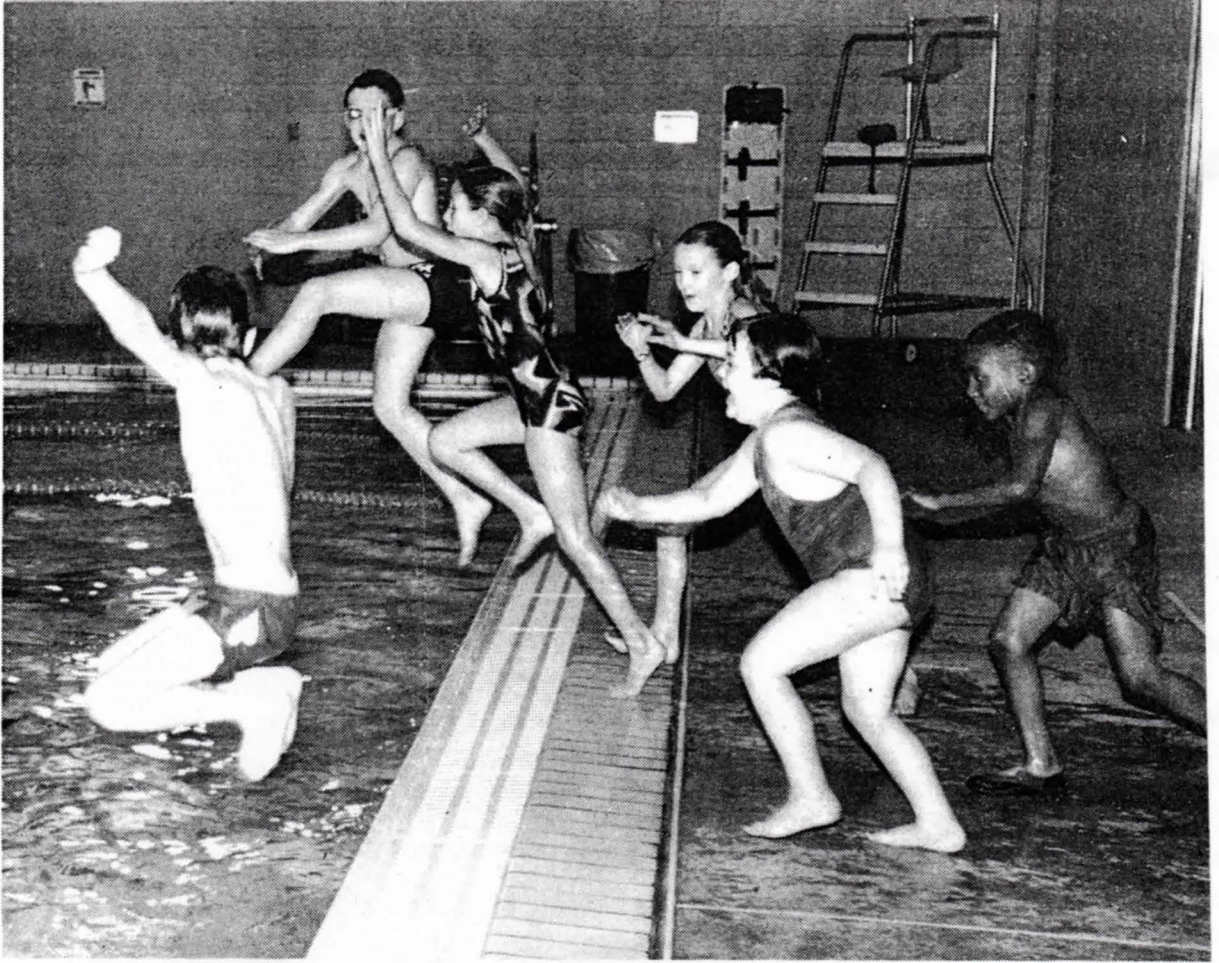




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By ANGELA LEONARD
Staff Writer

With the completion of a new indoor swimming pool last summer at the Reeves Community Center, it seemed that the center had reached the level dreamed of at its founding some 54 years ago.

But changes and improvements continue at RCC, with the renovations of the former basement bowling alley to classrooms and a gymnastics practice room, and the purchase of the former Chamber of Commerce property across the street for additional parking.

Opened in 1942 as a YMCA, RCC is the result of a group of city leaders who envisioned the need for a recreation center long before communities worried about organized recreation. The center at the corner of Renfro and East Pine streets initially included a bowling alley and a gymnasium, but in the intervening years has gone far beyond that.

The center still houses a gymnasium, but other facilities now include an outdoor pool; two racquetball courts; a free-weight workout area; a Nautilus fitness center; space for aerobics, dance and karate classes; and another gymnastics area.

For other programs, center staff members go off-site to tennis courts at Riverside Park, or ballfields at Riverside and Westwood parks where they run youth and adult tennis classes, adult softball leagues, and youth leagues in soccer, tee-ball, Little League baseball, Babe Ruth

summer baseball and girls' softball. In recent years, according to RCC Director Terry Pruett, the programs have become increasingly more popular.

"Adult programs are growing by leaps and bounds," he said. That growth helps offset the cost of youth programs, since they generally require subsidies from the center, while adult programs are self-supporting.

Newest Additions

The indoor pool opened last June after several months of construction and anxious anticipation. "It's now used at 85 to 90 percent of capacity," said Pruett. "That's ahead of what we expected."

One of the most exciting new uses for the pool allows all fourth grade students from Mount Airy Schools to have basic swimming lessons. The children come in the mornings and are grouped according to skill level for their classes. Pruett said that eventually he hopes to be able to incorporate Surry County children into the program as well.

In addition to the children's swimming classes, the pool also hosts the competitive swim team, which practices at 6:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. each day. Team members last year were traveling to Winston-Salem each day to work with coach Jeff Tunstall. "They are very dedicated," said Pruett.

Other regular uses include water aerobics, a scuba diving class, high

school swim team practice, adult lap swimming, recreational swimming, and senior citizens swimming.

Renovations in the basement area have transformed the old bowling alley into a new gymnastics room with a spring floor and a higher ceiling than the old room upstairs.

Four multi-purpose classrooms have also been added downstairs. Pruett said they are suitable for dance classes, aerobics, karate, general meetings for coaches and teams, and use by the after school program.

Childcare Programs

RCC last fall began an after school program for students from Mount Airy's elementary schools. The program, which has enrolled 75-80 kids, provides transportation from the schools to the recreation center and then involves children in programs at the center until their parents pick them up after work.

The children may participate in regularly scheduled activities, and also benefit from programs arranged just for them, such as free swimming time at the indoor pool.

Pruett said that efforts are also underway to expand a nursery program for mothers who want to come to RCC to participate in programs but need child care. "We need more mothers so we can operate this in a worthwhile manner," Pruett said. "We want to see this grow."