



Message from Mitchell Englander

With nearly \$300,000 raised so far in this year's Community Gifts Campaign, so far, we're heading toward the March 9 finish line and our \$400,000 fundraising goal! I want to thank all those who have pledged so far and encourage those who haven't contributed yet to consider joining our fundraising effort.

Across the country, YMCAs have begun to re-emphasize their non-profit mission of helping communities, families and individuals. In the past, many YMCAs neglected that mission, stayed within their own four walls and operated more like recreation centers. The YMCA came to mean just "gym and swim" in many neighborhoods.

But here at the North Valley Family YMCA, we've always kept our mission of service to the community in the forefront. We've expanded over the years to provide, among other services, PE instruction at 26 elementary schools, child care at 14 elementary and middle schools, youth sports leagues for 1,700 children and preschool care at two locations. These vital services bring families together, promote character growth in kids, strengthen our Valley communities and make North Valley a model for other YMCAs to follow.

So, please respond generously if a fundraising team member contacts you or take the initiative and contact Miki Shelton, 818-368-3231, mikishelton@ymcala.org.

Mitchell Englander is chair of the North Valley Family YMCA's Board of Managers and chief of staff to Councilman Greig Smith.

Ex-Collegiate Swimmer Shapes Up Swim Program

North Valley's aquatics director Sarah Baham-Atkins doesn't talk much about her past swimming exploits: a state high school record in the butterfly stroke that went unbeaten for more than a decade, All American on her college swim team and a competitor at the Olympic trials in 2000.

But Baham-Atkins drew upon that past to revamp North Valley's swim program over two years, first as the aquatics coordinator and now as aquatics director. Thanks to her work, North Valley has gone beyond the simple water safety for kids and recreation swim classes found at most YMCAs to develop into a focused program that helps kids and adults become stronger, better swimmers.

"Any person who comes into our program wants to develop into a swimmer," Baham-Atkins said. "If parents put their kids in a swim program, I want the kids to learn more than safety or just floating, they should learn to swim. If they want to go on and swim competitively in high school, they can."

Her hands-on approach means North Valley swim instructors jump into the pool and teach there, not stand dry outside the pool. The impact has been apparent, says North Valley member Francis Gonzaga, whose two sons – three-year-old Kai and six-year-old Brandon – take swim lessons.

"The swim program is more efficient and the kids like her a lot," Gonzaga says. "They are constantly testing them so that those who excel move up and are not held back and

Read more **SWIM** stories on p. 3



HEALTHY CHOICES

are here at the North Valley Family YMCA.

Changing Lives - One Meal at a Time



Jesse Katz and Ed DeSouza are on a mission to change lives – one meal at a time.

The duo, billed as “Chef Poppy & Me,” both overcame severe health challenges by changing their diets. Now healthy, they spread the knowledge they’ve gained during healthy cooking demonstrations monthly at North Valley. Last year, they taught at North Valley’s elementary school child care programs and provided free breakfasts and lunches during monthly member appreciation days. They also appeared at this January’s Health Expo.

Katz previously couldn’t digest food and suffered from severe stomach pains after every meal, plus chronic strep throat. Doctors, unable to diagnose and cure her condition, prescribed a slew of drugs and antibiotics. Instead, Katz changed to a natural diet and later obtained a bachelor’s degree in nutrition.

Now, healthy and fit, she teamed up with DeSouza, who

himself previously weighed 303 pounds and had diabetes, conditions he overcame through healthy eating. Together, they created a course geared to kids eight years and older and parents.

“It’s not a drop-off program,” Katz says, but one that focuses on how children can help in the kitchen and make food choices on their own, while parents ensure that the home is stocked with healthy provisions.

Katz and DeSouza teach families how to create a healthy lifestyle through high fiber diets, cooking grains like quinoa and brown rice, smart grocery shopping by reading labels and picking healthy ingredients and preparing quick and delicious, healthy meals and snacks.

They’re hoping to start their own health foods company because so many YMCA members have asked to buy their healthy flour and fiber blends, cookie batters, banana bread and waffle mix.

“We’d love to do more,” Katz said. “We want to see how far we can go.”

Chef Poppy programs are held four consecutive Saturdays. Next session starts March 6th, so sign up today.



HEALTHY CHOICES

are fun at the North Valley Family YMCA.

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those who need more help are not under any pressure. Everyone is at the level of instruction they need to be.”

Baham-Atkins comes from a family of swimmers with 11 other brothers and sisters and coaching from two older brothers, Michael and Stephen. She swam for the Temple City High School team, broke records there and held the state CIF record in the 100-yard butterfly from 1998 to 2009.

She went on to swim for Arizona State University as an NCAA All American swimmer competing in the butterfly, backstroke, freestyle and breast stroke and breaking swim records again. She swam at the Olympic trials in Indianapolis in 2000 before ending her competitive career. Now married, she has a five-year-old son, Asher, who competed last year for the Loma Alta Sharks.

With spring just around the corner, Baham-Atkins is gearing up for the busy spring/summer months. She’s working to revamp the swim program to incorporate character growth by having youngsters better understand the discipline involved in building swimming skills – coming to class on time with equipment and ready to work out – and the responsibility of helping other kids in the water.

“I want to keep the reputation that North Valley has of providing quality swim lessons,” she said.

Swim Sample

Parent Child

The parent/child program at North Valley Family YMCA helps show parents how to teach and bond with their infants. Learn:

- Personal safety and growth
- Stroke development (water adjustment, breath control, balance and locomotion)
- Games and Rescue

Skipper Program (Preschool aged children 3-5 years)

In this program children first become acclimated to the water, and advance at their own pace, allowing children to explore and to build their skills gradually while enjoying the water and developing confidence in their aquatic skills. The program levels are:

- Pike (beginner)
- Eel (advanced beginner)
- Ray (intermediate)
- Starfish (advanced intermediate)
- Sea Horse (advanced swimmer)

Progressive Program (School aged children 6 years-up)

With levels ranging from beginner to advanced swimmer, children will practice and work on developing complex skills. During instruction, children will work to develop life-long positive character traits and improve on their competitive swimming skills.

The levels in this program are:

- Polliwog (beginner)
- Guppy (advanced beginner)
- Minnow (beginner intermediate)
- Fish (intermediate)
- Flying Fish (advanced intermediate)
- Shark (advanced swimmer)

Adult Swim Program

Adults can learn to swim at the YMCA too! Adult classes are open to beginners as well as those who want to improve their strokes. On Saturday mornings and Monday and Wednesday evenings. We recognize that the development of physical skills for adults happens differently than for children. Progress is measured as an accumulation of skills and not the time it takes to master those skills.

HEALTHY CHOICES

are yours at the North Valley Family YMCA.

March Calendar:



To sign up for any of these activities, log onto www.ymcala.org/nv or visit the Welcome Center.

- **Preschool Health Expo – Fun, Tour & Essential Info: Sat. March 20th**

Moms and Dads can get tips on dental care for kids, pediatric health, holistic nutrition and other essential childrearing information, while kids have fun at a puppet show, arts & crafts table, obstacle course, face painting and more!

10 a.m. to noon – YMCA Preschool Learning Center, (for children 2 to 5 years-old), 15950 Chatsworth St., Granada Hills

1 p.m. to 3 p.m. – YMCA Infant & Preschool Center, (children 6 weeks to 5 years-old), 11630 Indian Hills Rd., Mission Hills.

Speakers include holistic nutritionist Karen Roth, MS NC who will tell parents “How to Keep Your Kids Out of the Doctor’s Office.” Pediatrician Janesfri De Silva will focus on “Fighting Common Childhood Illnesses.” Meanwhile dentists from Blooming Smiles, a Northridge pediatric dental service, will speak on “Good Oral Hygiene for Your Kids.” Providence Holy Cross Medical Center will provide valuable information and other San Fernando Valley organizations will participate.

- **Family Fun Night: March 12th**

Join us for “Dance Around the World;” fun for the entire family! Register at the Welcome Center. Only \$17 per family.

- **Summit Seekers Hikes: March 6th and March 20th**

March hikes include an easy, 1.5-mile hike geared for families with younger children, starting at 9 a.m., Sat., March 6 at the Peter Strauss Ranch in Agoura. A second hike at 9 a.m. Saturday, March 20 is a 4.5 mile, moderate hike at the Eagle Rock Loop in Topanga State Park. Hikers meet at the trailhead. For location information, contact Jody Guerrero, 818-368-3231, ext. 2329, jodyguerrero@ymcala.org.

- **Parents’ Night Out: March 19th**

Parents, want a night out? Well, you are in luck! Bring the kids to the YMCA for fun, games, sports, arts and crafts, snacks and swimming (ages 8 and up) while you enjoy time to yourself! Register at the Welcome Center. Only \$17 per child.

- **Schwabe Book Fair: March 22nd-26th in the Lobby**

- **Child Care: Swashbuckling Spring Break Adventures** Ahoy mates! From March 29-April 2, 2010 campers will celebrate their desire for discovery as they navigate their way through the times when pirates sailed the high seas. Age appropriate activities, projects and games provided. Contact Nicole Casper at ext 2390 for more information.

- **2010 Healthy Kids Day and Camp Sign Up: Saturday, April 17th, from 10am-2pm**

Sponsored by Providence Holy Cross Medical Center, the event is *free and open to the community*.

Activities include: YMCA Youth Performances, health information booths, youth activities, Chef Poppy & Me Cooking Corner, inflatable jumpers, rock climbing wall, music, kids’ crafts, raffle and more. Register for summer programs: day camp, resident camp, expo camp, and our youth swim lessons and fitness classes. For more information, contact Bryson Atkins, 818-368-3231, brysonatkins@ymcala.org.

