



Photos by Ernest A. Brown

Members of the Woonsocket Whalers Swim Team dive in for their final practice in the YMCA pool before competing in the New England Championship at Worcester Polytechnic Institute on March 16th and 17th.

# YMCA pool fundraising page making a splash

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WOONSOCKET — Donors have already contributed over \$1,000 to the YMCA Pool's online fundraising page in the one week since it went live.

"By contributing and donating your hand-earned money we hope to maintain the pool for the following year," the page reads.

The Y's pool was slated to be shut down with the rest of the Woonsocket YMCA facilities in January after Jeff Merhige, CEO of the YMCA Pawtucket, informed members that the building was too costly to continue operating in the city. Members were offered a discounted membership transfer or prorated discount, but public

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Woonsocket Whalers swim coach Ami Cinqmars, right, chats with her team before the start of practice recently at the Woonsocket YMCA pool Thursday. The team are getting in their final practices before competing in the New England Championship March 16th and 17th at Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

# Pool

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outry soon followed that focused primarily on the pool.

Mayor Christopher Beauchamp and the City Council stepped in, approving \$45,000 of the city's American Rescue Plan Act funds to keep the facility open at least until the end of March while they worked on finding a more long-term funding solution. In the meantime, the Woonsocket Whalers YMCA youth swim team and the Mount Saint Charles Academy swim teams were able to close out their seasons at their home pool.

Dr. Patrick Nugent, an OB-GYN at Landmark Hospital who also chairs the YMCA Pawtucket Board of Directors, said Beauchamp asked him to help set up the fundraising page using the online platform GoFundMe. He said he talked to the other board members and Merhige about using the Y's non-profit tax ID to establish the page with the promise that all of the funds raised on the platform will go toward keeping the Woonsocket pool open.

"I think they realized how passionate I am about the Y," Nugent said of the other board members. "Woonsocket really needs a pool."

The fundraiser is still a long way off from the \$50,000 goal set on the page, but Nugent said the amount of donations that have already come in signal "interest" that many more will follow.

Nugent, who said he's been swimming there on and off for about eight years, said the YMCA still wants to keep a presence in Woonsocket, and would be open to continuing programming at the pool if the city was responsible for the facility's operational costs. He didn't disagree with their decision to sell the rest of the YMCA property, he said, but "the pool's a good pool."

"The Y is good at running programs," he said. "The building was just so antiquated. If we could work out keeping [the pool] open, the Y would send people."

Beauchamp has said at council meetings that the developer who purchased the YMCA property has indicated openness to leasing the pool facility to the city. He has also said the

city and the YMCA teams are developing a system for selling pool-only memberships and/or charging a daily use fee to raise the revenue needed to offset the operational costs. Beauchamp did not respond to a request for comment on Friday.

Nugent acknowledged that Beauchamp and the City Council have been trying hard to find a way to keep the pool open, even as the city faces a likely budget shortfall this year and the looming disappearance of the one-time federal pandemic aid. In the meantime, he said he has been reaching out to celebrities like Kevin Hart, who's been vocal about his past competitive swimming experience, and Rhode Island's own Olympic swimmer Elizabeth Beisel about boosting the fundraising message.

"I'm just trying to get people excited about it," Nugent said. "Swimmers – it's a lifelong thing we do. If I can get access to these people, I truly feel I could talk them into it."

He's also approaching other nonprofits like the Boys & Girls Club of Northern Rhode Island and the YWCA in Woonsocket about potential partnerships, as well as local corporations like CVS.

"I'd get a tattoo on my forehead if CVS gave us money," he said.

Under the current arrangement, the pool is scheduled to shut down again at the end of this month. Until then, it remains open to YMCA members, including those who have already transferred their membership to another location, five days per week for lap swimming and water aerobics.

Individuals can donate to the GoFundMe page by going to [gofundme.com/save-woonsocket-ymca-pool](https://gofundme.com/save-woonsocket-ymca-pool).

Follow Stella Lorence on Twitter @slorenc3.

## LOTTERY N

Friday's RI Daily

Mid-day: 0-2-3-0

Evening: n/a

Thursday's Lucky 4 Life

7-24-27-29-43

LB 10

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**DATE:** Saturday, March 23, 2024  
**TIME:** 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 Noon  
**PLACE:** SLATER PARK - "Paul J. Wildenhain I Animal Shelter"  
**COST:** \$10.00 per animal – C (Checks will not be accepted. Correct change will be required.)

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