

If you've paid a visit lately to any of the Arlington-Mansfield Area YMCA locations, you've likely noticed that the organization is undergoing something of a metamorphosis. No, check that. What's happening at the Y – at *your* Y – isn't simply a transition; it's a revolution, inspired by revelation and driven by resolution.

Over the past year and a half, YMCA President/CEO Eric Tucker and the Y's Board of Directors have launched a project called the

dramatically over the years. Tucker and the YMCA board took notice and have made it Priority One to craft their organization not only to acknowledge the various changes, but to embrace them.

At the grassroots level, Y officials began seeking the input of those they serve and hope to serve and started creating viable services for members and for the community at large, based on what they learned. "We've been able to engage over 40 volunteers throughout the

YOU BELONG!

The YMCA's Commitment to Diversity, Inclusion and Global Engagement Service

DIG Initiative. The "D" in the acronym celebrates diversity, the "I" emphasizes inclusion, and the "G" represents global engagement.

Another explanation is a tad more concise (and just as accurate): The Y + DIG = something for YOU, whoever YOU are.

"What DIG is, is intentionality of being a diverse organization and being welcoming of all," Tucker says. "The Y is made up of people of all ages and from every walk of life working side by side to strengthen communities. Together we work to ensure that everyone, regardless of ability, age, cultural background, ethnicity, faith, gender, gender identity, ideology, income, national origin, race or sexual orientation has the opportunity to reach their full potential with dignity. Our core values are caring, honesty, respect and responsibility – they guide everything we do."

Tucker says local Y leaders' decision to become part of the innovative project was born from the aforementioned revelation: Demographically speaking, the Arlington/Mansfield area has evolved

community who really represent all segments of the people who live in Arlington and Mansfield." Tucker says. "What we've done is we've broken down how we've engaged volunteers in the six key areas. We've looked at how we want to engage members, programs, leadership development, collaboration – so what kind of organizations and things we can reach out to? – resource mobilization – so, how do we raise money to support the programs? – and then brand and visibility."

On the latter front, for example, the fruits of the research helped define an ongoing Y project. The Arlington-Mansfield Area YMCA has a \$1.6 million renovation in the works at its North Branch. All of the signage is in English, Spanish and Vietnamese. The reason? The volunteers noted that many people in the Y service area speak those languages.

The research conducted as part of the DIG Initiative hasn't been confined to this region, however. Last March, Tucker joined other



YMCA volunteers on a trip to Vietnam, where the AMA YMCA has a partnership with the Y in Saigon. The local contingent built schools with other YMCAs in Southern Vietnam – and, in the process, became better aware of the ways of their new friends in the region.

Five more local Y representatives will return to Southeast Asia this spring, and Tucker says the ventures have served and will serve to help the Arlington-Mansfield Y better address the needs of the Vietnamese population in Arlington and Mansfield.

“We have Vietnamese members, but not at the level we could. The population here is huge,” Tucker says, noting that the trip last year and the one planned for this year accomplish a variety of purposes.

In addition to the tangible benefits born from one community helping another, trip participants from the local Y come back home with a better understanding of one segment of the populace that it seeks to serve – and now crafts programs that attract new members and create interest in the Y from prospective new members.

That kind of global engagement is one element of the “For All” that is at the heart of both DIG and the Y’s quest to better meet the needs of its community. “For all’ is a simple but powerful phrase,” Tucker says. “Without it, the Y mission is incomplete. Our commitment to inclusion creates better communities, a better country and a better world.”

In turn, it also produces a local organization that is better prepared and equipped to fulfill the mission the YMCA has embraced since it was founded in 1844: to put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind and body *for all*.

“We know that the key to effectively nurturing the potential of children, improving the community’s health and well-being and supporting our neighbors is a passionate, experienced and diverse array of staff, volunteers and members who value what everyone brings to the table,” Tucker says.

To help define just who everyone is, the local Y is implementing a



five-part plan this year, highlighted by the following actions:

- It will participate in the U.S. Census Bureau’s community-wide effort to make sure that everyone is counted.
- It will purchase a percentage of all goods and services from women- and minority-owned businesses.
- It will target new community organizations and partner with them.
- It will serve as a community space for all faiths and include new programs tailored to address the needs of the people who meet there.
- It will continue to participate in and deepen involvement with the Vietnam World Service trip by inviting five key staff and volunteers to attend the 2020 trip noted earlier.

Tucker says the Arlington-Mansfield Area YMCA also will establish a Diversity, Inclusion & Global Engagement Committee that will meet quarterly to ensure that DIG goals are being met, including the advancement of one level in each of the DIG progressions steps.

Collaborations will be at the heart of this year’s implementation of the DIG Initiative. “Collaborations with diverse global and local community partners expand our reach and impact,” Tucker says. “Engaging in meaningful partnerships and facilitating collaborations among organizations with common goals positions the Y as a

convener that brings together individuals, organizations, communities and the world.”

The local Y has long been involved in community collaboration efforts, but the new emphasis has expanded the list of partnerships to nearly four dozen entities. The roster runs the gamut, from the Arlington Parks & Recreation Department to Mission Arlington,

THE DIG PROGRAM is a huge expansion of the Y’s mission to serve the entire community by bringing together individuals of all different walks of life and furthering their knowledge and tolerance for each other. It’s a very ambitious endeavor that can have far-reaching results in all of our different communities in a non-sectarian way. We all fear the unknown, and hopefully this program will help bridge that gap with understanding.

– Board Member, Val Gibson



from the Arlington and Mansfield Independent School Districts to the Miracle League, from the Rotary Club to places of worship, such as The Fields Church.

Tucker says one of the newer alliances, born from the decision to invest time and resources in Vietnam, is with the US Pan Asian Chamber of Commerce-Southwest. “We helped start the Dragon Boat Festival last year at Viridian,” he says. “That was a direct result of conversations we had around [the AMA YMCA’s engagements in Asia].”

Tucker says many of the Y partnerships are founded and are able to flourish because people in this region have enthusiastically embraced the local organization’s commitment to the DIG Initiative.

“The community engagement has been awesome,” he says, adding that he is impressed by how other local organizations have also recognized the evolution of the populace in this area and share the Y’s yearning to address specific needs and refine strategies that serve the most people accordingly.

Here are some statistics provided by the YMCA that depict the changing landscape throughout much of America – including here – and that underscore the importance of measures such as DIG:

- 13 percent of the U.S. population is foreign-born.
- Between 2010 and 2050, the Asian population in the U.S. will grow by 134 percent.
- More than 60 million speak a language other than English at home.
- By 2050, 22 percent of the U.S. population will be 65+.
- The number of people identifying as multi-racial increased by 32 percent from 2000 to 2010.
- 39 percent of immigrants identify as non-Christian. Muslims

(10 percent), Hindus (7 percent) and the religiously unaffiliated (14 percent) comprise the largest groups.

- 9 million U.S. adults identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.
- 30 percent of LGBTQ youths have attempted suicide.
- 45.3 million people live in poverty in the U.S.

Tucker says the local organization is committed not only to digesting these new norms and others like them, but to creating

a local YMCA that is ready, willing and able to provide programs and services that appropriately address urgencies outlined in the data.

“Reaching new members requires understanding those who live in our community and engaging them according to their needs,” he says. “[To do that], we consider the cultural and social issues facing all segments of society, from newcomer/immigrants to LGBTQ individuals, implement inclusive policies and practices that ensure success for all, and intentionally recruit and retain members who reflect and build bridges between all segments of society.”

In other words – actually, in essence – Tucker, the Board, the

volunteers and the members are working in concert to create a YMCA that is, indeed, “for all.”

“One of the quotes I like is ‘Diversity is being asked to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance,’” Tucker says.

Arlington and Mansfield, would you like to dance? [A](#)

WE STARTED PARTNERING with the Y 10 years ago because of their Christian heritage and their obvious commitment to serving everyone in our community as seen in the diversity of its members. This gave us the perfect opportunity to help them lift high the “C” of YMCA in Arlington and Mansfield, as well as in places like Vietnam in 2019. DIG helps us keep diversity at the forefront of everything we are doing so that as many people as possible are included in our outreach, here and around the globe!

– Bryan Sloan, Pastor, The Fields Church

GET INVOLVED!

If you are interested in supporting us by donating, volunteering or becoming an advocate to YMCA’s Annual Support Campaign, email Heidi Hardy at Heidih@amaymca.org or call her at 817-299-9629, ext. 1600.