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## **Their doors might be closed, but the Ocean County YMCA is hard at work in the community**

The Ocean County YMCA continues to offer virtual programming, reassurance calls, meals, homework assistance and social outreach throughout the COVID-19 outbreak.

Toms River, June 18, 2020 – Even though their doors remain closed, the Ocean County YMCA, located at 1088 West Whitty Road in Toms River, has been hard at work in the community serving Crisis Relief Boxes, Grab N’ Go Lunches, implementing virtual programming and homework assistance, making reassurance calls to Y family members and providing social outreach.

“Since the start of this pandemic, our promise to you and your family has always been to not let social distancing become social isolation,” said Peter T. Rosario, President and CEO of the Ocean County YMCA. “We have since served thousands of meals, offered critical virtual content for people of all ages, increased telephone outreach initiatives to protect our most vulnerable members, implemented online learning opportunities and remained connected with our followers on social media.”

### **Feeding the Community**

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, around 22 million kids receive free or reduced-cost meals thanks to the National School Lunch Program. However, once the school year ends, only 17 percent of those same kids are able to access free meals over the summer break, leaving many children without these meals.

The Y, in partnership with Toms River Regional Schools, is working to fill that gap by keeping children healthy and well-nourished this summer, ensuring that kids reach their full potential. Approximately 5,000 children receive meals from

the National School Lunch Program. The YMCA is located centrally between two schools, Walnut Street School and Joseph A. Citta School, which both have over 50 percent of its students who benefit from the National School Lunch Program. On June 15, a second location for distribution was added at South Toms River Elementary School to provide for families living in that area of town.

The Ocean County YMCA will be serving Grab N' Go meals Monday through Friday from 11am-1pm until the end of August. Participating youth receive nutritious lunches and snacks daily. This program is the first of its kind in Toms River and is being operated in partnership with the Capital Area YMCA, which is currently providing 2,100 meals daily to residents of the greater Trenton community.

"Hunger has a lasting impact on the development of children," said Rosario. "From the first days of this crisis, we have partnered with Fulfill by packing food boxes at the BEAT Center and distributing Crisis Relief Food Boxes at the Y. Giving kids access to nutrition-filled meals allows kids to focus, learn and become empowered to reach their full potential. The Y's Summer Meals Program is a monumental next step in our efforts to combat hunger." To date, the Y has served 56,467 meals and counting.

### **Virtual Programming & Social Outreach**

At the onset of the pandemic, the Ocean County YMCA quickly transitioned over to virtual programming for its many in-studio classes. "From fitness and yoga to meditation, we wanted to make sure the community still had access to all the great programs we offer at the YMCA," said Rosario. "In addition to our weekly classes, we also offer weekly moments of encouragement on our Facebook page that has been really well received. To date, we have had over 31,607 virtual programming views."

The Ocean County YMCA's Book Club and Crochet Club also continue to meet virtually. The Book Club has even welcomed *New York Times* best-selling author Amy Stewart as a special virtual guest. "It is so wonderful to see the community step up during times like this to help bring positive light to others," said Andrea Amante, Program Coordinator.

Speaking of bringing positivity and joy to others, the Crochet Club has been able to do just that by taking in important social initiatives during this time such as "CLICK for Babies: Crochet a Cap, Help Save an Infant" organized by the National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome. Ladies in our Crochet Club

crocheted caps in all shades of purple that were distributed to new parents, along with a video and booklet about Shaken Baby Syndrome. The group also participated in the "Hooked on Crochet" initiative during Dr. Martin Luther King Week of Service by crocheting nests for the millions of displaced and injured birds being rescued and rehabilitated as a result of the wildfires in Australia.

### **Reassurance Calls & Homework Assistance**

Since the very beginning of the shutdown, the Ocean County YMCA was able to keep the lines of communication open with our members to see how they were doing and if we could help them in any way. "From families with children to our senior population, we wanted to check-in with them through these reassurance phone calls to see if everyone was okay," said JoAnn Kermick, Membership Director at the Y. "To date, we have made over 2,500 phone calls, and, for many of our members, we were one of the only people they spoke to that day."

Another area that the Ocean County YMCA felt passionate about was homeschooling. "After seeing the burden that homeschooling had on so many families in our area, the Ocean County YMCA stepped into help," said Jennifer Friedhoff, Senior Youth Development Director. "Our Y Kids Counselors were able to Zoom with students in our Y Kids program to help them with their homework. These 30-45-minute sessions really helped to alleviate the pressure of so many parents."

### **A Bright Future**

Looking to the future as the Ocean County YMCA prepares to re-open its doors, Rosario says everyone's safety and well-being will continue to be the Ocean County YMCA's top priority. "Although our building is still closed to the public, we have now started to offer outdoor fitness classes," he said. "Registration for our Summer Camp program that begins on July 6<sup>th</sup> is ongoing and has been overwhelmingly popular. While camp will be different this year, the Y will provide a welcoming environment for campers to express themselves, try new activities, learn new skills, be creative, make lasting friendships and have a great time! All social distancing guidelines and CDC recommendations will be enforced which will help to direct and prepare the children for their return to school in September. This is the start of our reopening and we look forward to embracing the bright future that we all have ahead of us."

To learn more about the Ocean County YMCA, visit [ocymca.org](http://ocymca.org). For virtual programming and updates on outdoor classes, please follow the Ocean County YMCA on Facebook @OCYMCA.

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## **About the Ocean County YMCA**

At the Y, we take immense pride in our work to strengthen communities and help all of us be our best selves. We provide a place to play, to learn, to be healthy, and to give back. We believe that everyone, no matter who they are or where they are from, deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential. Everything the Y does is in service of making sure people and communities thrive. The Ocean County YMCA in Toms River features the following onsite amenities: 6,800 sq. ft. functional wellness arena, cardiovascular center, 12 lane competitive size pool with access to adult and family locker rooms, and child watch room. To learn more, visit [ocymca.org](http://ocymca.org).

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# COMMUNITY IMPACT

Making a difference when it matters most.

**While our doors were closed,** our hearts and minds have remained focused on your needs.

Pictured left to right of Crisis Relief Food Boxes:  
**Corey Matthews,**  
Head Swim Team Coach,  
7 years of service  
**Jamie Beers,**  
Aquatics Director,  
12 years of service  
**Maurien Morris,**  
12 years of service



 **31,606**  
Virtual Programming Views

 **56,467**  
Meals Served

 **Over 2,500**  
Reassurance Calls

 **40**  
and growing  
Homework Assistance



 **188,338**  
Social Outreach

Barb Serpi,  
Welcome Center Supervisor,  
24 years of service at the Y

During these trying times, **our promise to you and your family is that we would not let social distancing become social isolation.** We served thousands of meals, created virtual content for people of all ages, increased telephone outreach initiatives to protect our most vulnerable members, implemented online learning opportunities, and remained connected with our followers on social media. **As we prepare to re-open our doors, we want you to know that your safety and well being will remain our top priority. WELCOME BACK!**



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**THANK YOU FOR  
#STAYING  
WITH US**