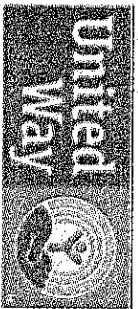


United Way of Laurens County and YMCAs have a fitting partnership

By Jennifer Brown

For The Chronicle

(This is the final story in a four-month-long series on the United Way of Laurens County partner agencies).



Way. We are here to serve the community."

Both the Clinton and Laurens YMCAs are living by the YMCA mission to put Christian principles into practice through programs that build a healthy spirit, mind and body for all.

More specifically, that mission targets the five key areas the United Way of Laurens County aims to address by financially supporting partner agencies: education and literacy, health and wellness, strengthening families, helping youth succeed and preparing for assisting during times of personal disaster.

Last year, the Laurens Family YMCA received \$26,500 from the United Way of Laurens County to help support its services. The Clinton Family YMCA received a \$25,000 United Way allocation.

Clinton YMCA Executive Director Gene Simmons said 100 percent of United Way

funds are used to help provide financial assistance to families who may not be able to afford YMCA programs otherwise.

"We are so appreciative of the United Way, and the funds we receive," said Simmons. "We don't want to deny anyone the opportunity to participate in our programs."

YMCA offerings include adult education programs, health and physical education, recreation, children's activities, swimming pools and programs, aerobics, fitness facilities, ball fields and more.

After-school programs and summer camps, in addition to a host of athletic activities for children, keep the youth of the county busy and safe year-round.

"Not only does the experience provide the exercise necessary to promote a healthy lifestyle, it gives the children much-needed interaction with other children from around our community in a way that meets the physical and spiritual needs of all involved," said Caroline Thomas, executive director of the United Way of Laurens County.

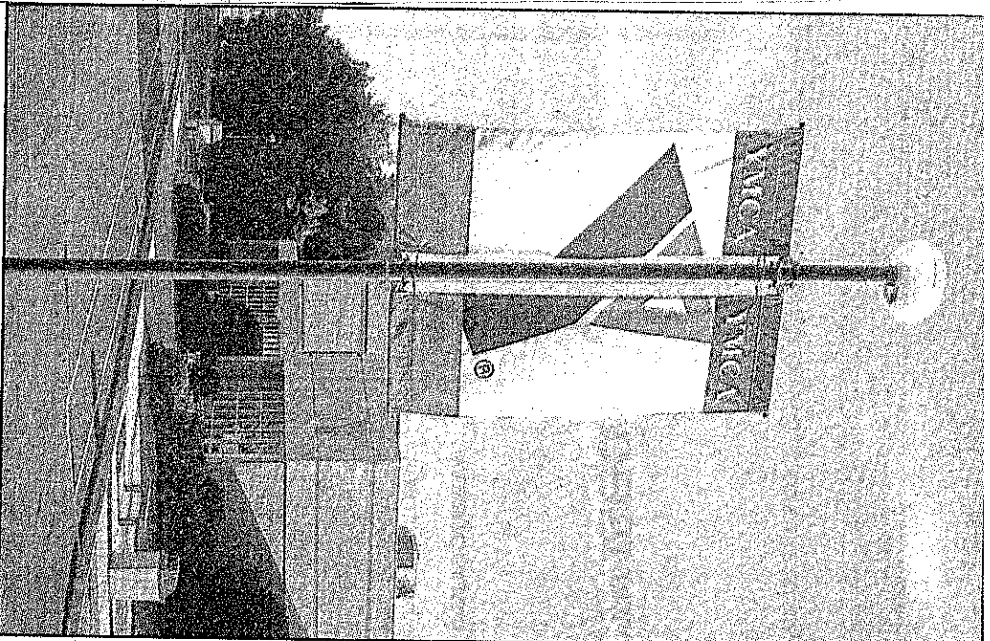
"Thanks to both YMCAs, the playing field is leveled and opportunities to engage children from around our community are in place. We are fortunate to have two excellent facilities that cater to the health and wellbeing of our children," Thomas said.

The YMCA's health and wellness component is met through a commitment to providing state-of-the-art exercise equipment and fitness programs to members and non-members in the community.

The Silver Sneakers program helps senior citizens get moving and Activate Laurens County — a year-long healthy living awareness program — aims to motivate the entire county toward lifelong weight and fitness success.

Harlan said the United Way's support and sponsorship of Activate Laurens County program is vital.

"We are proud they elected to join us in the endeavor to help fight obesity in the county," he said. "Through (United Way's) continued support we will be capable of offering the many programs the residents of Laurens County deserve and need."



Fitting cause: The Clinton Family YMCA received a \$25,000 United Way allocation last year to help provide financial assistance to families who may not be able to afford YMCA programs otherwise. —Photo by Jennifer Brown