



Posted on Tue, Dec. 09, 2008

Workouts & play

BY KAREN SHIDELER
The Wichita Eagle

KIDS AND PARENTS GET MOVING TOGETHER AT THE FARHA FAMILY CENTER AT THE EAST Y

Bobbie Haydon and her daughters have sampled all the Greater Wichita YMCA branches. "But once we saw how they redid this room -- oh, yeah, this was our spot," Haydon said recently, looking around the Farha Family Center, which reopened a couple of months ago near the lobby of the East Y.

Off to her side, Gabby, 12, and Sunny, 8, were focused on Dance Dance Revolution, their feet following the lightning-quick steps outlined on a video screen on the wall in front of them.

At other Y locations, Haydon said, the girls would amuse themselves with computers or board games while Mom took a class, which meant the girls were mostly sitting and quickly bored.

"We were regulars, but they didn't do much," she said.

"Here, I can do stuff with them."

That's the point of the Family Center. It's meant to get kids and their parents up and moving -- giving them a workout, often without them even realizing it.

It's equipped with something for everyone:

In the back of the room are elliptical machines, stationary bikes and weight equipment. That part of the room tends to attract adults, though the weight machines are scaled down for youth use, too.

In the middle are four Espresso bikes -- fitness bikes with video screens that can be programmed to show a virtual ride along the coastline or over forest trails, or a chase involving dragons and colored coins that can be captured for points.

"After a while, you forget you're actually exercising," Haydon said, cycling after a green dragon. "The points -- I want the points."

And in the front of the room are the real kid-pleasers: Dance Dance Revolution, Wii and a kickboxing game in which the object is to kick (or hit) one of nine spots as they light up.

Before they discovered the Family Center, Gabby and Sunny were always ready to leave before Haydon, 34, was. Now, she and the girls are at the Family Center three to four times a week, for two to four hours at a time.

Usually, she plays with them for a while, then slips off to a class, then returns to play some more.

Gabby said her favorite stop in the Family Center is Dance Dance Revolution -- she plays at the "difficult" level. She also likes Wii bowling and said she usually shares an activity with her sister.

Sunny, creating new characters at a second Wii station, said Wii is her favorite stop, especially the tennis game. "I'm a video game person," she said.

And while they may be playing video games, there's nothing couch potato about it: Sunny and Gabby were in constant motion.

The East Y is the only branch with a Family Center, but one is being added at the South Y. The target opening date is Jan. 1.

Haydon wandered back to the Dance Dance Revolution dance mats, helping two other moms get started on the game. A girl, maybe 6 or 7 years old, sat on the floor next to the second DDR screen to put her shoes on.

"Are you done?" Haydon asked. "You don't want to play anymore?"

There seemed to be a hint of disappointment in her voice.

Reach Karen Shideler at 316-268-6674 or kshideler@wichitaeagle.com.

© 2007 Wichita Eagle and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.kansas.com>