

## There's a new why in YMCA, (not YWCA)

Not since the heyday of the tacky but irresistible Village People has the YMCA taken such a hit in terms of misrepresentation and honest mistaken identity.

Your local YMCA of Shreveport-Bossier changed its name in January to YMCA of Northwest Louisiana. Too bad it's the front part of the name that's caused confusion.

Since the YWCA (notice the W, or upside-down M) began having catastrophic financial and administrative troubles last year, the YMCA (notice the M, or upside-down W) has suffered collateral damage.

Even though three of the four letters in the acronym are the same, the two aren't locally affiliated. It's just one letter, but it's the difference between being either pregnant or not pregnant: You're one or the other, and never a "little bit" of either.

"Literally every day, someone asks me about 'our' troubles," said YMCA CEO Gary Lash. "And it's not just people on the street. It's even been from the news media."

A television reporter called Lash for an interview when Lash happened to be at Camp Forbing one day. "Aren't you locked out of Forbing?" the reporter asked.

"Another guy asked me why I wouldn't sell that Allendale building," Lash said.

The answer: Because the building, since sold to a private entity, didn't belong to the YMCA. It belonged to the YWCA. The YMCA selling it would have been tacky. And I would guess, sort of illegal, like me selling your car.

"I pretty much just try to tell people that we're the YMCA,

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not the YWCA," Lash said. "We're not related at all here, never have been. They've been more about abused women programs. We have a much broader scope in health and fitness, sports, after-school programs, seniors programming."

It's not a catastrophic situation for the YMCA, to clarify or altogether dodge daily this misunderstanding; the YMCA has had its share of the real thing in the past. In the late '90s, the organization lost 1,100 members in a two-year time, mostly to the new fitness and wellness centers. In 2003, the YMCA struggled with debt until selling some of its land and reorganizing both its focus and day-to-day operation.

Camp Forbing is solidly back in the mix after being idle for years and even has a full-time director now. Open house at the Ellerbe Road facility is Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., a chance for the area to learn about more than a dozen camps offered this summer. Call (318) 674-9622.

Shreveport's YMCA has 1,700 member units (either singles or families) now. Plans are for Bossier expansion; a market survey suggests a potential for 5,000 member units in north Bossier if a YWCA were available.

I mean YMCA. Not YWCA. Common mistake. Sorry.