



YMCA Teen Center Promotes Youth Fitness Entertainment-Equipped Machines from Life Fitness Engage Young Exercisers, Tackle Rising Obesity Rates

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention about two-thirds of young people in grades 9 to 12 are not engaged in recommended levels of physical activity. This disturbing trend has caught the attention of the management at YMCA of Greater New York.

They decided to fight back by opening a 6,000-square-foot Teen Fitness Center at its South Shore Branch in Staten Island. The new center addresses ongoing complaints from kids and adults over a lack of positive recreational places for young people to go to workout in New York City. Outfitted with the iPod®-compatible Elevation Series™ and Circuit Series Strength Training equipment from Life Fitness, and interactive fitness games like Dance Dance Revolution, the center is now geared to get teens moving.

"Kids think that all of the interactive equipment is cool," said Mike Spezzano, vice president of programming and membership for the YMCA of Greater New York. "Offering high-tech, engaging products helps portray the Y as an exciting, cutting-edge place for teens to exercise." The Teen Fitness Center was built as a separate gym space, set away from regular gym goers at the YMCA. All of the young participants are given an orientation on proper equipment use before being let loose in the facility.

"Teens are a growing segment within the fitness industry, and the YMCA is showing how different and new approaches engage teens," said John Stransky, president of Life Fitness. "This facility shows teens how workouts can be fun and also helps spark their interests in creating healthy habits that they can use for the rest of their lives."

In its first year, membership has exceeded Teen Fitness Center goals, and several of the young exercisers have experienced dramatic results. One motivated 16-year-old wanted to put a stop to his couch potato ways. With the help of his cardio and strength-training program at the Teen Center, he was able to shed excess pounds and get healthy in six months.

"The reaction from the teens has been great," Spezzano added. "Now we're looking to create a similar experience in other branches and expect to see two new teen exercise areas within a year." Statistics on childhood obesity from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- Obesity among children has nearly doubled in the last decade.
- Daily participation in school physical education among adolescents dropped 14 percent between 1991 and 2003, from 42 to 28 percent.
- Overweight children and adolescents are more likely to become obese as adults. One study found that about 80 percent of children who were overweight between ages 10 to 15 were obese adults at age 25.
- Overweight children and adolescents are at a higher risk for health problems, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol and Type 2 diabetes.