

Great addition to the downtown

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IT'S ANOTHER WIN for Beloit with the announcement that businesswoman Diane Hendricks will donate the building space to accommodate relocation of the Stateline Family YMCA.

The YMCA will move to the downtown Ironworks complex, greatly aided by the Hendricks donation valued at \$4 million. The organization still has fund-raising to do in order to pay for the build-out, but this announcement makes that task considerably less of a barrier. In fact, YMCA Executive Director Doug Britt says his organization is about halfway to its \$7 million goal.

The new YMCA will include, among other amenities, a warm water pool, a lap pool, an indoor aquatic play area, basketball courts, exercise rooms and room for families with child-care needs.

IT ALL FITS with Beloit's efforts the past quarter century to reclaim the City Center, including the Rock River corridor. The Ironworks project is an extraordinary part of that process, and the addition of the YMCA adds yet another key element.

In a sense, the net result of all the work on the City Center has been to reanimate Beloit's core. There's a place to go, whether one is looking for work or for leisure. Those who've been around awhile will remember when skeptics almost expected to see tumbleweed blowing through Beloit's downtown streets. Years ago, people flocked to the city's downtown — its commercial center, if you will — but those days had passed here, much as they had in communities across America as people and commerce moved to outlying areas, usually clustered around interstate highways.

The smart money placed bets on downtown commercial districts never making a comeback.

But anything's possible, if you have the right people and strong commitment. Beloit's City Center is beautiful today, and it will be more beautiful tomorrow. The YMCA is just the latest success.

A FINAL WORD: Here and there one hears the chronic complainers note that while the YMCA has a new home the old building along Riverside Drive will be abandoned and could become an eyesore. Seriously, ask this question: Over all these years have Diane Hendricks and her late husband, Ken Hendricks, left a bunch of abandoned eyesores around town? Of course not. So give credit where it's due, for another in a long series of philanthropic improvements to our community.