

IT'S A Y WORLD!

Meeting "Friends Abroad" In Albania

By DIG Committee Member, Julie Hill



The exchange of YMCA pins in Albania: Board Member Julie Hill and husband Christopher Hill, former US Ambassador to Iraq, with Eglantina Lula of the Tirana YMCA

I recently had the opportunity to visit the YMCA in Tirana, Albania, while honoring the 25th anniversary of the re-establishment of relations between the United States and Albania. The US embassy in Tirana had reopened after more than four decades, restoring the historical ties between the two countries. During our visit, the President of Albania, Bujar Nishani, awarded, my husband, Chris, for his role in reestablishing the embassy. President Nishani stated, "Ambassador Hill was the first American diplomatic representative in our country after more than four decades. The long-awaited day when the US embassy was reopened in Tirana marked a decisive turning point in the restoration of historical and spiritual ties between our countries and peoples."

Today, Albania is a thriving democracy. Here, the Tirana YMCA is a non-governmental, non-profit organization that empowers young people by assisting and strengthening community development. The Y is part of a cooperative movement of YMCA Europe with direct partnerships with the World Alliance of YMCAs.

We met with the Y's Eglantina Lula, sharing the Denver YMCA's programs and ideas and discovering our common goals. Like our YMCA, the YMCA in Tirana provides services promoting health, community education, environmental and social well-being, capacity building, public awareness, and youth leadership.

I presented Eglantina with a Denver YMCA International Pin and she reciprocated with the Albanian Eagle "flying" to the Denver YMCA. Our meeting was the first step in building friendship, support, and future collaborations between our two organizations.

Learn more about Friends Abroad at www.DenverYMCA.org/Friends-Abroad

DIG INNOVATION Y, STEERING AND STRATEGY COUNCIL TO TACKLE SIX SOCIAL ISSUES

In its "Partnering for Equity" Conference in September, the Global Centers of Excellence Steering and Strategy Council committed to focus on six social issues affecting YMCA communities and to lead efforts to:

- Decrease social isolation and disconnection
- Promote community involvement and civic engagement
- Establish community support systems to address changing demographics and family structures
- Address community transitions and tensions that lead to negative engagement and interactions
- Close social and economic gaps that perpetuate inequities
- Increase resources to promote equitable access

At the conference themed "Partnering for Equity," the council also announced that the Global Centers of Excellence (GCE) Network, now DIG Innovation YMCAs, which brings together 71 YMCAs from throughout the country, will be renamed the "DIG Innovation Network." The change will be implemented throughout 2017 and will better represent the network's role in leading an integrated diversity, inclusion, and global approach in engaging and serving Y communities.

ABOUT DIG

Led by YMCA trustees, YMCA of Metropolitan Denver representatives, community volunteers, and University of Denver interns, the Diversity, Inclusion, and Global Innovation YMCA is dedicated to ensuring that everybody feels welcome at the YMCA. To learn more please contact Debbie Ford at dford@denverymca.org

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BRIDGE BUILDER

A newsletter of the YMCA of Metro Denver's
Diversity, Inclusion, and Global (DIG) Innovation YMCA
March 2017 Third Edition



INCLUSIVE OPPORTUNITIES

High school graduates Christopher and Owen are empowered to reach for their goals, no matter their limitations. They are part of a special internship program designed for students with disabilities. Through a partnership with Jefferson County Public Schools and the YMCA, they – along with four other grads – are getting the important experience they need to keep moving forward.



Experience that opens doors

According to JeffCo Public Schools, the Y internship is the first chance many of the students have to interact with their community.

Christopher, (pictured left), who has autism, works at the front desk and gives tours. He has learned how to provide excellent customer service which has improved his communication skills. Owen, (pictured below), who also has autism, does office work and data entry both fostering his interest in computers.

The power of potential

With the skills he has learned in the internship, Christopher has been offered a paid position at a nearby grocery store. And Owen plans to move on to another job involving computers and one day become a motivational speaker, advocating for people with disabilities.



"I like helping people. I want to inspire them. I would say to people with autism that they should do what they want, just as other people do." Chris says.

"The experience for everyone – staff, volunteers, and interns – is transformational," says Jim Hiner, President & CEO of the YMCA. "We see potential, and we believe in all that people can do."

WELCOME FROM DIG

The Diversity, Inclusion, and Global (DIG) Innovation YMCA Committee strengthens the Y's commitment to ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive through the YMCA. Here we're pleased to share news about our activities and programs.

STRENGTH AND SUPPORT FOR ALL PUSHING THROUGH PARKINSON'S AT THE YMCA

Inherent in every branch, program, and event of the YMCA is inclusion. The Y is a place where everyone is welcomed and everyone is given support to reach their full potential, even if they're facing issues that challenge their health.

In line with this guiding principle, Parkinson's disease classes are offered throughout the Denver YMCA. The classes not only welcome people with Parkinson's, they give people an opportunity to exercise, which experts say is a vital component to maintaining balance, mobility, and activities of daily living.

Fitness that changes lives

At the Schlessman Family YMCA, "Pedaling for Parkinsons" is based on studies that show that "forced exercise" on a stationary bike – riding at a set speed three times a week – can reduce Parkinson's disease symptoms by up to 35%. Led by instructors trained to work with people with Parkinson's, the class is educational and inspiring. "Everyone has the same thing in common," says John Carlin, who leads the program. "The playing field is level, and we all just have fun."

Also at the Schlessman Family YMCA, the Parkinson's High Energy class focuses on interval training, endurance, and cognitive and voice skills. Moreover, it empowers people with Parkinson's disease to think about all they can do, instead of their limitations.

"We challenge people and let them know they're still living their lives," says program coordinator Sheila Bellew.

Support that strengthens

At the Susan M. Duncan YMCA, people like Katie Kline have joined a Parkinson's exercise class that combines Tai Chi and relaxation to slow down the progression of Parkinson's, improve function, and help build strength, mobility and confidence. Knowing that exercise is an essential part of managing Parkinson's, Katie calls the Y her "second home" and appreciates the camaraderie and its positive effect on her mind and body.

Additional Parkinson's programs are offered at the Downtown and Boulder Valley YMCAs. Programs are taught in collaboration with the Parkinsons Association of the Rockies and the GZSobol's Parkinson's Network, an organization committed to improving the quality of life for people with Parkinson's disease.

To learn more, visit www.denverymca.org/parkinsons

Photos by: John H. Fielder, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, Villanova University



Katie Kline finds strength and encouragement in the Parkinson's Exercise Class.



Active Older Adult Coordinator Jonie Krickbaum began teaching the Parkinson's exercise Classes after she saw a pressing need in the community. She soon sought her certification through the GZSobol's Parkinson's Network.

GLOBAL STRATEGIES: EMPOWERING YOUTH TO CHANGE THE WORLD

What happens when young people are believed in, nurtured, and given a chance to lead? They learn skills, build confidence, and discover their potential to change the world and shape the future.

Every year at Thanksgiving, teenagers from throughout Colorado gather at the State Capitol for the General Assembly of the YMCA's Youth in Government program. They write bills, prepare speeches, run for office, and see up close the legislative, judicial, and executive process that governs Colorado.

This year was the program's biggest year with 195 students serving as senators, representatives, lobbyists, and members of the press, and leading the assembly in roles as governor, speaker of the house, and president of the senate. Students spent three days debating more than 70 bills addressing issues such as equal pay for women, assisted suicide, and fracking bans.

At the end of the 2016 General Assembly, Youth Governor Ian Miles, a senior at Pueblo West High School, delivered a final message: "These three days have given you the experience to change the world. So go out, take whatever impact this program has made on you and use it to do good. Use it to make our world a better place."



About Youth in Government

Youth in Government is part of a national program which has attracted over 68,000 students in 38 states. The program is an essential component of the Y's youth development efforts, and it gives kids who might not normally have the opportunity a way to develop leadership skills, confidence, and legislative knowledge that can jumpstart education and careers.

SHARING EXPERIENCES TO PROTECT YOUTH

Government and private sector experts from 20 countries met with the DIG Committee to discuss how to keep youth engaged and away from the type of negative settings that often lead them to becoming victims of human trafficking.

Sponsored by World-Denver, a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing a deep understanding of global affairs and cultures, the visit provided an opportunity for the YMCA to share information about Y programs that contribute to the growth and safety of young people and their families.

Also, pianist Shazia Ali led an interactive activity, showing how music can bring youth together and increase their self-confidence. The visit also spurred lively discussion about how the Y could do even more – locally and internationally – to engage and protect children.

Dan Wienecke, manager of the Visitor and Exchange Programs for World Denver, said the experience was wonderful for everyone. "This was the perfect balance of engaging, fun activities and meaningful, transformative, and substantive dialogue," he said.



Strengthening families and communities: Learning and sharing with international leaders.