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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Virtual Fundraiser Rallies Community Support for YMCA

September 2020: Northbrook IL – Members and friends of the North Suburban YMCA stepped up with enthusiasm to support the Y’s annual Strong Kids Fundraising Event last week. This year, the event went virtual, due to the many obstacles of COVID-19. The 6-day event hit totals that matched previous years, plus engaged many new Y supporters through a digital platform.

“The virtual platform was a huge challenge for us, but our goal was to open our reach beyond the normal Strong Kids event guest list,” stated Kim Nyren, Director of Community Investment and Events. “Our hope was to engage new supporters and educate them on our mission. Thanks to multiple days, and many activities and videos, we quantitatively hit more people during the week than we would have engaged at a single on-site event, which was our biggest success!”

Like many other organizations, the Y found its original plans for an April event restricted due to the pandemic. The Y’s leadership pivoted to an online model that involved a variety of programming during the 6-day event. Virtual attendees participated in a tour of the online auction hosted by local legend Ron Bernardi, a Zoom painting and wine party, mixology and cooking webisodes sponsored by Tito’s Handmade Vodka and Francesca’s North, and ended with a virtual trivia game. Auction items generously donated by area businesses brought in over \$35,000. The videos that were highlighted each day featured community members that the Y has helped over the years. As the week continued, more and more active participants joined in on the Y’s campaign for funding. The final event, the Friday virtual trivia party also engaged over 150 participants and brought in more donations through a live “text to give”. With the help of the auction and “Fund the Need” videos, the Y raised almost twice as much in scholarship funds as anticipated.

“The Strong Kids Auction was better than ever this year,” remarked Jim Tanner, Y member and participant of the virtual event. “Participation for me and my wife was quite meaningful, because I was able to help kids, the Y, and our community.” Jim Tuchler, a Y board member and host of the “Fund the Need” video added, “I feel passionately about the mission of the Y, and adapting our approach to fundraise virtually was effective, as we made good use of the circumstances.” Another Strong Kids auction participant Kristi Dahlke whose family has been a member of the North Suburban YMCA for over 20 years remarked that, “Even during these unprecedented times, with the Y’s membership dues being down, they still found ways to give back. For all the Y does for our community, I’m happy to support its fundraising efforts.”

Throughout the week the Y also paid tribute to two people who had a major impact on its legacy. A remembrance video dedicated to Alta Theil, a founder of the Y and who recently passed away and the honoring of recently retired NSYMCA CEO and President Howard Schultz, who stepped down in April after 13 ½ years. Schultz, who was awarded the Thiel Award for Social Responsibility, was also recognized in a testimonial video featuring a wide variety of Y community friends who remarked on his spirit and dedication. Schultz also wrote and sang an original song called, “Save the Y Again” and dedicated it to this year’s challenges.

“We are so grateful for the way the community participated in this fundraiser,” said Kathy Fielding, NSYMCA CEO. “The Annual Strong Kids Dinner is always our most important single source of fundraising, and taking it virtual was going into uncharted territory. Though we did better than expected on this virtual approach, our Y still needs support more than ever. Our efforts to keep the doors open remain strong this year with more planned events so we can continue to provide the programs and services our community needs now more than ever.”

The Ken & Alta Thiel Strong Kids Scholarship Fund has provided critical funding that enables the Y to keep its life-changing programs and services available to all, regardless of their ability to pay. One out of five individuals at the Y, over 2,800 people a year receive financial assistance through the Strong Kids Fund. This allows children and their families to participate in after-school programs, summer camp, life-saving swim lessons, older adult services, and other wellness activities.

Proud sponsors of the Strong Kids Virtual Fundraiser include Wintrust Community Banks, Northwestern Medicine, Illinois Bone & Joint, First Bank of Highland Park, Waterway Carwash, FGK Services, Pioneer Press, 94.7 WLS-FM, Covenant Living Northbrook, Align Wellness, and many more.

Donations to the NSYMCA Strong Kids Fund make Y programming available to anyone in the community, regardless of their ability to pay. Financial support is also needed to help offset reduced revenue and added expenses caused by the pandemic. To learn more about ways to support the YMCA, contact Kim Nyren, Director of Community Investment, knyren@nsymca.org.

About the North Suburban YMCA

The North Suburban YMCA services Northbrook and 14 surrounding communities with programs and tools that help its residents become healthier, more connected, and confident, ensuring that everyone, regardless of age, income, or background, has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive. The NSYMCA focuses on Youth Development, Healthy Living, and Social Responsibility and is a 501(c)3 charitable organization, inclusive and welcoming to all in our community. Learn more at NSYMCA.org.



PHOTO 1 - Caption: The NSYMCA Strong Kids Fundraiser included a special “Gift Basket” pick-up table. Seen here from left are Sandy Veith, Jerry Nolan, Cathy Gregory, and Debbie Madeley.



PHOTO 2- Caption: The NSYMCA Strong Kids Virtual Fundraiser’s “Fund the Need” video featured Y Board Member, Jim Tuchler as the host.



PHOTO 3: The NSYMCA Strong Kids Virtual Fundraiser included a ZOOM painting party. Seen here is Johanna Benavides and her daughter Talia with their finished artwork.



CAPTION: Basket pick up with Henry Fetta from Hunger Free Northbrook and Jerry Nolan, Y Board Member and Volunteer.