

# STORIES FROM THE Y



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

A Publication of the Rye YMCA

Spring/Summer 2012 [www.ryeymca.org](http://www.ryeymca.org)

## FROM FEAR TO FINISH LINE



Standing in the murky waters off Sandy Hook, New Jersey, Susan Hyland began to hyperventilate. "I can't do this," she told her Y trainer Denise Cypher. Denise, who had seen Susan through months of training for the Danskin Women's Triathlon, calmly replied "Yes, you can." And then Denise repeated the mantra over and over: "yes, you can."

Members of the Rye YMCA since 1996, Susan and her family have spent countless hours keeping fit. Susan, now 55, works out in the Fitness Center, while her husband Mark, a competitive swimmer in college, keeps in shape by swimming laps.

"I would go to the Fitness Center three or four times a week, usually in the morning after I had dropped my youngest at school," Susan says. "But I was never a big one for classes." If classes held little interest, the pool was off-limits. Although Susan enjoyed swimming as a child, two incidents in her twenties left her with a fear of water. "I was on vacation in the Caribbean with my girlfriends when I was pulled under by a riptide—twice, one year apart," she told the Y's staff. When Susan joined The Tribe, a new YMCA women's triathlon group, in the spring of 2011, she felt that she "literally could not swim."

The brainchild of Laura Tiedge, the Y's Senior Director of Healthy Living, The Tribe brought together thirty women, all at various levels of fitness, to train for the 2011 Danskin

Women's Triathlon. None of them had ever competed in a triathlon and they had just six months to prepare for the event, which involves a half-mile swim, a 10-mile bike ride, and a three-mile run.

Encouraged by her friend Michelle Dennis, a Y member who also joined The Tribe, and supported by her family, Y staff, and the other Tribeswomen, Susan began to train. However, a new job threw her routine off course, and her desire to "become a swimmer" faltered. That's when her husband stepped in. "He brought me to the Rye Golf Club and said "do one lap. If you can do one, you can do 72," Susan recalled. "I did my first lap on July 1. The race was on September 11."

While Susan began to make progress, her resolve occasionally failed. "I didn't think I could do this," she admitted. "But Laura was just so fantastic and Denise was so inspirational. Denise said 'you're going to do this because I'm going to be with you.'"

On September 11, 2011, Susan climbed out of the water at Sandy Hook after completing a half-mile swim. The first people she saw were Mark and her Tribe sisters. "Every one of those girls were there at the finish line cheering me on, like it was the Boston Marathon."

Asked if she would do it again, Susan didn't hesitate. "Absolutely! It was so inspiring and gave me such a feeling of accomplishment." After a brief hiatus, Susan is back in the pool, taking Laura's swim clinics and looking forward to not just the next competition, but to one day taking her future grandchildren to the beach.

[Click here to view a video of the TRIBE.](#)

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Letter from the Executive Director	2
STORIES FROM:	
Lucianna DiGiacomo	2
Shira Hoffman	2
Christina McMullen	3
Tom Saunders	3
FOR COMMUNITY	4

## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

More than brick and mortar, more than our bylaws and committees, the YMCA is made up of people: members, staff, volunteers and friends, all of whom have been impacted by the Y in different ways and have amazing stories to tell. This newsletter, the first in a series, is our attempt to tell just a few of those stories. We have been inspired by the successes, struggles and determination of those who pass through our doors every day, and hope you are too. If you would like to share your triumphs—large and small—or just want to express what the Y means to you, please contact Lisa Tidball ([lisatidball@ryeymca.org](mailto:lisatidball@ryeymca.org)). We look forward to hearing your story too.



Gregg Howells  
Executive Director

## GETTING STRONGER TOGETHER

**Luciana DiGiacomo**

**LIVESTRONG at the YMCA participant**

As a cancer survivor, it's important for me to be around like-minded people who know what I'm talking about, who know what I'm dealing with. LIVESTRONG at the YMCA gave our group just what we needed.



We come from various types of cancers, and we know what we can and can't do. The staff and coaches were so wonderful and so supportive. It made all the difference.



Learn more about our LIVESTRONG at the YMCA program and watch a video at [www.ryeymca.org/livestrong.htm](http://www.ryeymca.org/livestrong.htm)

## FINDING SUPPORT AND FRIENDSHIP AT THE Y

Eight years ago, Shira Hoffman's life changed dramatically when she was abruptly struck with adult onset epilepsy. After enduring several difficult brain surgeries, Shira, now 38, began the long road toward recovery, determined to regain her speech and abilities.



She began swimming and working out at the Rye Y and the Y responded by surrounding her with love and support. Y staff reached out and connected with Shira, helping her through her seizures and encouraging her to regain her physical strength. Shira worked out with Sarah Mariani in the water and Kimball Bocklet and Laura Laura in the Fitness Center. Exercise became crucial to her recovery and her state of wellbeing. When Shira's financial situation changed, the Y responded by providing financial aid.

The Rye Y has become a second home to Shira. She considers it a "wonderful place" and tries to work out three times a week. Shira in turn inspires Y staff and members with her dedication and optimistic spirit.

[Watch Shira's story on video.](#)



## TAKING CONTROL WITH THE YMCA'S DIABETES PREVENTION PROGRAM

Christina McMullen learned she was at high risk for developing type 2 diabetes from her physician after her third pregnancy. "I had gestational diabetes and my doctor told me I would develop diabetes within 5-10 years if I didn't change something. I was only 29. Both my parents have diabetes and my brother got it when



he was 32." That was 14 years ago and Christina has been working hard to prevent diabetes, but says, "It's (diabetes) always in the back of my mind. I know what I need to do, but it's hard to put yourself first." When Christina heard about the YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program, she was excited and thought it would be the extra help she needed because she felt "stuck and needed structure".

When asked about her experience in the program, Christina says, "Just being accountable and writing down what you are eating is huge. That first week when you're just writing down the foods, not even worrying about the details, is really enlightening. The most powerful thing I learned was how to eat well.

The group experience was really helpful because one person may be struggling with something and the group would bounce around ideas and a fresh perspective can really help. We encouraged each other. To see that it is such a struggle for other people too was unexpected. You always think it's just you struggling, but everyone in the group had different challenges and we collaborated and supported each other."

Christina also felt the program impacted her family and said, "The kids have been more conscious of how they are eating because they see the way I am eating now. It's different, before the program I was eating just salads and now I am eating more balanced meals and making healthier choices and it's better for all of us. I wish someone taught me that when I was young."

Christina says she is most proud of her general improved wellness, "I feel really good now, but I know I am not done. I learned it's not a weight loss program, it's about how to live a healthier lifestyle."

[Learn more about the YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program.](#)



Tom Saunders learned he was at high risk for developing type 2 diabetes from his doctor. "My A1C numbers were creeping up in the wrong direction and my doctor even told me I was a 'diabetic in training'. Weight has been an issue for me and my doctor has been trying to get me to lose weight for a while now." When Tom learned of his risk status he knew he had to do something and told himself to start losing weight, but as many people can relate, "It's a lot easier to say it than to do it."



Tom learned about the YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program at his Rotary Club meeting when Tanya Stack, the Rye YMCA's Program Coordinator, gave a presentation about the program. Immediately Tom thought, "It sounded like a good fit for me and I signed up within a week."

When asked about his expectations, Tom said, "I came into it with an open mind and my goal was to meet the program objectives which were pretty clear from the start. I met the program goal for weight loss and am working on the rest of it now, hoping to get the exercise component in there too. I was never a jock, I never wanted to work out, it (physical activity) was always something I had to do. Now, I am really trying to change my approach to activity, I'm working with a trainer at the Y twice a week and trying to go to Aquajog."

Tom commends the Y staff involved in the program and says, "Tanya and Scott did an excellent job conducting the sessions. They organized a very mutually supportive, empathetic group, and the group aspect was something I really enjoyed. Tom also notes the impact the program has had on his family, "My wife has been very supportive, she's following the nutrition piece as well and has lost 14 lbs. I've gotten a lot of positive feedback from friends and associates and that always feels good. I feel better overall, and I'm able to do more things since I'm not carrying as much weight, which has been great."

Tom says the most important thing he learned through his experience in the YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program is that, "It is possible to make a turnaround, to change the way I eat, to actually change my eating habits. I've made changes both in terms of quantity and what I am choosing to put in my mouth."

(Reprinted from the YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program Quarterly Update, March 2012)

# FOR COMMUNITY

## Soil and Worms and Plants, Oh My!



Mike Krug, a farm apprentice with Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture kicked off a series of Family Gardening workshops at the Rye Nature Center on March 18. Sponsored by Friends of the Rye Nature Center and the Rye YMCA, the three workshops—a fourth was rained out—gave families a chance to learn about soil, worms and other macroinvertebrates, and plant growth through hands-on activities.

Part of the Y's edible garden initiative, the series gave children and adults a taste of "seed to table" healthy eating. This program, and the Crunchy Carnivals (below) received support from NYS Senator Suzi Oppenheimer and United Way of Westchester and Putnam.

## "Crunchy Carnivals" Make Nutrition Fun

Jill Lankler, Stephanie MacKendree and Jen Dorf, members of the Mamaroneck School District's Wellness Committee, are all smiles over the success of Crunchy Carnivals, a series of night-time nutrition and wellness fairs held at four elementary schools during March National Nutrition Month. Hundreds of students and their families sampled nutritious snacks and learned about healthy eating through fun activities and games. And, Rye Y Group Wellness Director Diana Vita got kids and adults moving during Zumba classes that were offered at each Carnival.

Lankler and Dorf serve on the Rye YMCA's Cross District Wellness Committee. Kudos to all three women who mobilized a team of volunteers and community-based businesses for the Crunchy Carnivals.

