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Contact:
Stephen Abel
Communications Director
954-600-3469
sabel@ymcawnc.org

YMCA of Western North Carolina President and CEO Paul Vest to Retire

Board Launches Nationwide Search for Successor

Asheville, July 7, 2025 — Longtime YMCA of Western North Carolina President and Chief Executive Officer Paul Vest is set to retire on Dec. 31, 2025. Vest has served the organization for nearly 30 years, leading the YMCA through a period of significant growth and community impact.

"The Board of Directors is incredibly grateful for Paul's visionary leadership and steadfast commitment over the past three decades," said John Pierce, Chair of the YMCA of WNC Board of Directors. "From the smallest details to the largest initiatives, he has led with heart, vision, and an unwavering belief in the Y's mission."

30 years of impact

During Vest's tenure, the YMCA of WNC achieved several key milestones, including:

- Since 1996, the nonprofit has sustained annual revenue, membership, and fundraising growth to mirror the region's economic development:
    - Revenue grew from $2 million to $31 million, all of which has been invested back into the community
    - Membership went from 3,800 at one fitness facility to 50,000 across seven YMCAs
    - Donations, which enable the Y to offer its programs to all residents regardless of income, grew from $25,000 to more than $1.2 million. With the help of grant funding, the Y now provides more than $7 million in charitable services annually.
- Formation of the YMCA of Western North Carolina in 1998, expanding the nonprofit's service area beyond Asheville and Buncombe County.
- Construction of the Corpening Memorial YMCA in Marion and the Reuter Family YMCA in south Asheville, which both opened to the public in 2003.
- In 2004, became one of the first Ys in North Carolina to offer a household membership, extending family benefits to unrelated adults living together.
- Introduction of high-quality afterschool programs in area public schools in 2006; the YMCA of WNC is now the state's largest provider of school-age childcare.
- Opening the Woodfin YMCA in 2009, consolidating with the Henderson County YMCA to create the Hendersonville Family YMCA in 2011, launching the Ferguson Family YMCA in Candler in 2017, and converting Cheshire Fitness to the Black Mountain YMCA in 2018.

- Creation of a Community Health arm that operates more than 20 mobile food markets around the region and offers free diabetes prevention and management programs. The award-winning food programs are a model for YMCAs around the country.
- Development of YMCA Camp Watia in Swain County, an overnight camp dedicated to serving local families. The camp opened in 2016 and now serves 1,000 children and youth each summer.
- Economic recovery after the devastation of COVID-19 and Hurricane Helene. During the pandemic, when the association's facilities were closed for months, the YMCA of WNC pivoted to childcare for essential workers, virtual classrooms for remote students, and outdoor and online exercise classes. In the aftermath of the hurricane, when water and power was out for weeks, the Y fed tens of thousands of people, distributed emergency supplies, offered charging stations, hosted a Red Cross shelter, and opened our doors to the public for more than 12,000 hot showers.

"I truly believe in making it possible for everyone in our community to build a healthy spirit, mind, and body, and it has been my greatest honor to serve the community alongside our dedicated staff and volunteers," said Vest. "I am incredibly proud of what we have accomplished together. I am confident that the YMCA of Western North Carolina will continue to thrive in the years to come."

Executive search process
The Y's Board of Directors has initiated a nationwide search for a new CEO in partnership with the YMCA of the USA National Resource Office and the North Carolina Alliance of YMCAs. The ideal candidate will be a passionate servant leader with excellent business acumen and the spirit of innovation.

"We are committed to selecting a strong and innovative leader who will build upon Paul Vest's legacy and guide the YMCA toward a bright future," said Pierce.

A detailed executive vacancy announcement is available on ymca.org.

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About the YMCA of Western North Carolina
The nonprofit YMCA of Western North Carolina strengthens local communities through youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility. Founded in 1889, the YMCA of WNC engages more than 100,000 people – regardless of age, income, or background – to nurture the potential of children and teens, improve the region's health and well-being, and provide opportunities to give back and support the community. It does this through seven YMCAs, dozens of program sites, and YMCA Camp Watia. As the state's largest provider of licensed school-age child care, it gives more than 1,000 children a day the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive. For more information, please visit ymcawnc.org.