



DAMIEN SHERWOOD/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

**At Harrison Elementary, the program runs from the end of school until 6 p.m. While services are currently exclusive to Harrison, the plan is to expand the program to Bohemia Elementary in January.**

**YMCA** *from A1*

after-school program builds upon our 133-year commitment to grow and innovate in order to meet the evolving needs in Lane County.

The program at Harrison makes use of the school's cafeteria, gym, playground and project studio for an array of activities.

Children are treated to fruit snacks, games, physical activities, cooking, art projects and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) activities. In addition, the program offers homework assistance to students who need it.

Harrison Elementary School Principal Heidi Brown is a fan of the new service.

"The YMCA is about keeping kids physically active and mentally engaged in creative and fun activities and I love watching the kids do that every day after school," she said. "The activities are really well thought out and fun for kids. They're loving what they're doing."

The program runs from the end of school until 6 p.m. and services are exclusive to Harrison students due to high demand.

Still, the enrichment program has found it challenging to attract program staff applicants and is not currently operating at full capacity. Jackson said the recent addition of another staff member from Eugene is raising the enrollment to about 30 children, but while the wait list of children grows, the YMCA is looking for more qualified adults.

"Somebody that has experience in a licensed center, certified summer camp experience or credits in the field," said Jackson. "That's primarily what we're looking for, but we're definitely willing to hire aides."

Qualifications for aides could include people who have limited to no experience, but demonstrate a passion for working with children.

If the YMCA can reach its goal of three staff members, around 40 children may be enrolled in the program.

Brown is hopeful the program will find the staffing it needs.

"I love seeing the kids engaged in hands-on activities after school," said Brown. "I think so often young people fill their time with screen time."

The addition of the program to Cottage Grove serves a commonly-voiced need in the community as well.

"There's been a huge void to fill - that need for after-school care for our working parents," said Brown. "Especially if they work in Eugene."

While the YMCA's presence in Cottage Grove will do its part to fill a need for after-school care, some in the community are eager to see a more organized approach to the issue. Many of Cottage Grove's youth programs are run as insular operations.

"I think what's needed is a very consistent information stream and consistent participation" said Samantha Duncan, owner of local business Health Hub. "In a small community, it's almost more important than anywhere else for people who want a service to really commit to utilizing it once it's in place."

Health Hub won the Vision Keepers' Community Health Award this year for creating fitness opportunities for people of all ages. Duncan has included several youth-oriented classes in her business model.

"Little Movers," an obstacle course, tumbling and motor skills class lets little ones aged up to four years old practice social integration, balance and muscle memory.

Family Capoeira serves ages four and up with Afro-Brazilian movements which combine elements of dance, music and acrobatics.

For ages three to five, "Ants and Fireflies" teaches basic motor skills and balance with rolling, cartwheel and handstand lessons.

Lastly, ages four and up may also participate in a tumbling and gymnastics class for beginning to intermediate levels, which includes lessons on beam and bar mounts as well as rolls and handsprings.

Prices for kids start at \$35 per month for the youngest age groups and go up to \$55.

"I'd love to expand it, but my space is limited," Duncan said.

Other programs for

youth in the community do exist, such as gaming store Delight's own after-school enrichment program, Rogers Family ATA Martial Arts programs for beginners and South Valley Athletics' many sports options.

However, the relative obscurity of some of these programs has been a barrier to some and Brown confirmed requests for such after-school care are all too common.

Some more respite may be on the horizon, though, as the YMCA's program in Cottage Grove does not end with Harrison. Current plans are to expand

to Bohemia Elementary School in January as well, as long as staffing can be secured.

Jackson anticipates the expansion to find favor in the community considering recent responses.

"The support the community has shown us has been phenomenal," Jackson said. "The administration, the school staff, the kids and families - even the folks from Dutch Bros. They're so excited that we're out in Cottage Grove, so it's just such an

amazing feeling for us." Brown was also optimistic that YMCA programs could make lateral movements across the community.

"I hope that this is just the beginning of our partnership with YMCA," she said. "I'd love to see some summer camps in Cottage Grove that YMCA could run. I know that they do some preschool options. We're not quite there yet, but I know that that is a big need in our community."

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