

Path to the Y in New Albany

By **DANIEL SUDDEATH**

Daniel.Suddeath@newsandtribune.com

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— **The big day**

- The Floyd County branch of YMCA Southern Indiana opens at 8 a.m. Saturday. The entire facility will be open for exercise and recreation.

Bringing the YMCA to New Albany took years of planning, millions of dollars and approvals from various boards.

It's a venture combining the city, county and the private sector. And there's the hefty financial pledge from Horseshoe Foundation of Floyd County, which is covering nearly 90 percent of the building's approximately \$20 million cost.

Ground was broke for the Y at Main and State streets in late 2006 as funding arguments ceased. Former City Councilman and current County Commissioner Mark Seabrook said the Y survived — though some had reservations — by using Economic Development Income Tax, or EDIT, money to fund the public portion. The city and county are responsible for no more than \$137,500 a year for the next 16 years, which is coming from EDIT funds.

"I don't necessarily know that it was the best way to go but at that particular time, it seemed to be the only thing that would keep it alive," Seabrook said of the EDIT choice.

Property taxes are leverage in case the city ever defaults on its portion of the payment. Councilman Steve Price voted in 2006 for a plan that would have kept property taxes from being the city's safety belt for the project.

"I was against using property taxes as a guarantee because I foresaw what we're going through now," Price said.

"I don't like to use property tax as a backup to anything."

Price said there's always a question when developments combine a mix of public and private money. He added that he didn't want to see property taxes ever increased due to the Y.

"A lot of people said I was anti-YMCA, which was never the case," he said.

Seabrook, who is board president of Horseshoe Foundation of Floyd County, said not coming up with money would have meant losing out on a \$20 million gift from — what was at the time — Caesars Indiana.

Seabrook gives credit for the vision of the Y to former Mayor Regina Overton. He said she was the first to approach Caesars about the grant.

"The original concept was Regina Overton's baby," Seabrook said. "Other mayors have been involved since then and its survived through mayor changes."

Joe LaRocca, executive director of YMCA of Southern Indiana, said from the original blueprint in 2002 to the building's opening Saturday that teamwork has been vital.

The Y was also able to privately raise funding for the project, through Horseshoe and the public sector.

"There were some who maybe questioned it and had some problems with it, in the end I think everybody has embraced it," LaRocca said.

Price said the building is beautiful and likes the plan for low-income availability, which was approved by the Redevelopment Commission as part of the operating agreement.

Through the contract, the city-owned aquatics portion of the building will be managed by the Y, as well as the privately-owned exercise facility.

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