

SWANSON  HOUSE
SIGNATURE FUNDRAISING SERIES

THE NEXT PILLAR CAMPAIGN



\$7 MILLION RAISED FOR
SALINA FAMILY YMCA



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The phone call arrived as Robert Swanson sat in the Denver International Airport. There was no “Hello” or “Do you have time to visit?” Instead Robert heard, “You said it would come in waves. I guess I didn’t believe you.”



It was one of several important moments, reality checks actually, that Angie Lassley and her Campaign Leadership Committee (CLC) members experienced as they successfully conducted the largest campaign in the history of the Salina Family YMCA (Salina, Kansas).

“Four major gifts were confirmed that week I called Robert,” recalls Lassley, CEO of the Salina Family YMCA. “Robert said fundraising campaigns have dry spells; periods in time when prospects do not provide a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. ‘Stay committed to the process,’

Robert would say. Then a wave of donor decisions would be learned.” While the campaign occasionally tested the patience of Campaign Leadership Committee (CLC) members, each day they gained more trust in the process.

“I think a lot of us in capital campaigns want to believe a set number of gifts can be secured each month,” explains CLC member Ross Ostenberg. “It doesn’t work that way. Donors make their decisions in their own time. As a result, we learned that challenge grants with deadlines are a positive way to keep momentum.”

The Salina Family YMCA would earn several challenge grants and meet each one, providing forward movement. The Next Pillar Campaign for the Salina Family YMCA ultimately secured \$5.5 million in capital gifts, and \$1.5 million in annual fund gifts. More than \$1 million came from out-of-county and out-of-state funders.

“You have these thoughts about how it should all work, but it doesn’t,” relays Bill Medina, Campaign Chair. “You learn a lot about the methodology of fundraising and about people and relationships. Sometimes you smile and sometimes you are just left shaking your head. It can be a humbling experience to go visit with a potential donor, tell the story with all of the passion that you feel, but then leave without a commitment.”

Medina and the other CLC members would occasionally be disappointed by the decisions of former and current Y leaders. “I learned that just because someone served on the board does not mean they understand philanthropy or have a deep commitment to the organization’s mission.

“It can be disheartening,” continues Medina. “But then I would solicit someone who you thought had less capacity or less interest, and they would step up and make a significant

gift. That reaffirms your belief in your organization and your community.”

Medina said finding patience, allowing donors space to make decisions was sometimes challenging. “Our Swanson House consultant told us it takes time. We learned that sometimes individuals and foundations and other funders don’t communicate very well.”

One significant prospect was particularly challenging. “A major funder invited us to apply. We went in and presented as requested,” explains Lassley. “They declined our ask. They invited us back. They again said no. They invited us back a third time. This time they said yes. That was a long 20 months.”

The comment was a simple statement of fact as campaign volunteers were recruited. “Robert, we don’t have a lot of high-powered people sitting at this table.”

According to Swanson, it was another moment when fundraising reality versus myth came into focus.

“We learned you don’t need the most prominent people in the community on your campaign committee,” explains Ross Ostenberg. “None of us had ever led a multi-million-dollar campaign before.”

“A number of nonprofits still operate under the assumption that campaigns can only be successful if ‘the right people’ are involved,” says Swanson. “From our experience, and certainly research indicates, if nonprofits embrace the right structure—the framework of fundraising—and operate professionally and thoughtfully, donors will engage. A volunteer’s passion for mission and professionalism matters.”

“Robert said gifts would come in waves. He was right.” Angie Lassley, CEO

“If we heard it once, we heard it one hundred times from Swanson House,” recounts Medina. “Complete the four steps. Identify. Cultivate. Solicit. Appreciate. It works.”

“Those may seem like simple steps, but having fundraising counsel was critical,” explains Lassley. “Having someone to guide, train and mentor us—me specifically—was invaluable. Beyond executing the fundraising framework, the dynamics of donor sequencing and prioritization, tracking and management, solicitation strategy and messaging were all important elements of this campaign’s success. Swanson House was exceptional at helping us through it all.”

Development of the messages and narrative began with naming the campaign. Four Roman pillars from the Y’s original site in downtown Salina were moved and erected at the current Y facility which was built in 1978. They represented decades of service and the dedication of thousands who made the YMCA a priority. The pillars also symbolized the Salina Y’s longevity, stability, importance and never-ending mission to help children and families.

“The campaign was providing the ‘next pillar’ in support of this Y and this community,” says Lassley. “The message resonated.”

The Board Chair’s voice message was calm, but serious: “Robert, we are seeking a new CEO as of this week, and since we just started this campaign, I would like to visit with you.”

“When I spoke with Robert, I didn’t know exactly what I thought,” recounts Ostenberg, Board Chair CLC member. “We were five months into the campaign and we had to find a new CEO. I felt maybe we should pause the campaign. We didn’t.”

The Y’s longtime CEO had retired and his successor had been hired. The Great Recession had reduced Y memberships by a third.

► *continued on back*



— GIFTS — RECEIVED \$7 MILLION RAISED

GIFT RANGES	# OF GIFTS
\$500,000 & Above	2
\$250,000 to \$499,999	3
\$100,000 to \$249,999	14
\$25,000 to \$99,999	21
\$10,000 to \$24,999	22
\$1,000 to \$9,999	45
\$1 to \$999	Many

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► The Next Pillar..continued

Two for-profit, out-of-town fitness clubs had moved into the Salina community of 48,000. The Y had not updated its facilities in 20 years. And now, the Y was seeking its second CEO in three years.

"Ross and his board handled the CEO transition incredibly well," recalls Swanson. "Angie was the human resource director. Her major gift fundraising experience was limited, but they asked her to serve as the interim executive director and take on the campaign. She was a Y professional, and the board knew she was dedicated to the mission." Following a national search, and while still in the quiet phase of the campaign, the Salina Family YMCA selected Lassley as its next chief executive officer.

The transition of CEOs, the economy and other dynamics served as another reality check about campaigns and philanthropy.

"Declining membership, a challenging economy, changing leadership and increased competition were reasons to do the campaign," says Ostenberg. "I think some of us believed these dynamics would prevent us from moving forward. We found out they motivated and galvanized donors and supporters."

"The Salina YMCA is 132 years old, founded only 25 years after Kansas became a state," says Swanson. "It has been a cornerstone of the Salina community across three centuries. Its reputation was well earned. This group learned that when donors are approached honestly, thoughtfully and professionally, they help organizations address their challenges and improve the lives of those serve."



CAMPAIGN LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE

Honorary Campaign Chairs: Pat & Linda Bolen | Steve & Lynne Ryan

Campaign Committee Members: Bill Medina, Campaign Chair | Ross Ostenberg
Ron Reed | Bobby Richardson | Mark Speer | Angie Lassley | Virginia Spooner