ARIZONA'S LIGHTNING ROD FOR WHAT'S GOING ON LOCALLY, NATIONALLY AND AROUND THE WORLD™

mylife

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Our Planet's *Most Endangered* SPECIES

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CEO SERIES: ONE-ON-ONE

by ed martinez | **BRINGING BACK THE AMERICAN DREAM**

The Valley of the Sun YMCA is one of the largest human services nonprofit organizations in Arizona. As the oldest nonprofit in the state, celebrating 120 years in 2012, the YMCA serves local communities in Maricopa County, Pinal County, Yuma, Flagstaff and Prescott—offering more than 283 programs and 26 social services at 22 locations. Members are welcome regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity, age or ability to pay. The YMCA aims to provide members with every opportunity to reach farther and improve their lives and the lives of those around them. The YMCA's goal is to inspire positive and lasting social change. Find a local branch or learn more by visiting valleyYMCA.org.

MyLIFE: With the current polarization that exists among Americans, nearly everyone is capable of finding a reason or an excuse to disagree with virtually anything. What suggestions would you offer for change? What must be done to enable our children a brighter future, and how do you think the YMCA can help them?

Scobas: Maybe I can take that a different way … taking a look at what happens at the YMCA. At the YMCA there are a lot of different people who come to really work on healthy lifestyles. It's kind of neat having people who have a common goal, a common interest, and really to put aside everything else. They don't care what color they are—brown, white, black—it doesn't matter. Political preferences—it doesn't matter. They all come to work out for one common goal, and I think it's kind of unique. I see that at the YMCA. In my 39 years with the Y, that's what happens. You have people who are in the streets who come here to work out alongside businessmen. They don't know who they are, what they do, or whatever. So, all differences are put aside. I think if we could all focus on a vision or a common goal, we can go a long way.

If you take a look at our youth … it's important that they have a healthy lifestyle. There are a lot of kids who are overweight and really don't have a good nutritional background or program. I think the Y can really focus on those kids. For me, I think, education is also very important. My family has been here in the Valley 10 years, and we moved around to seven or eight schools until we found the right school that we felt would give our kids the right education. That's just our family. A lot of families don't have that urge or initiative to get the kids in the right schools. Here in Arizona we have to do a better job educating our kids.

Our Chris-Town YMCA is kind of unique because we put in a medical and dental clinic there. Probably about 5,000 of those kids had never had any dental or medical care, so a lot of them were going to school not feeling good, with toothaches and other problems. We've seen tremendous growth in them as individuals, and for many of them, their grades have improved as they've gone in and gotten first-time dental care. So, to me health is very important.

MyLIFE: What can you tell me about your parents when you were growing up? What key lesson or core principals did they teach you that you feel are important and that you still incorporate into everyday life?

Scobas: Both of my parents are Greek immigrants, and I think probably the biggest thing was that early in my life they instilled a good work ethic. I had to deliver papers, I had to shovel snow—everything to earn a nickel. And I couldn't keep that nickel. They put it aside for me to use to go to school or whatever. The other thing that my dad said to me was, "Come to work every day as if it could be your last day—because there are no guarantees in life. So, if you do a good job, you be there. If you don't do a good job, don't count on being there." I think that's helped me. He was an older gentleman, coming from Greece. My parents lost their parents in the war [World War II]. I grew up in an old traditional home.

PROFILE

Name: George Scobas
Year and place of birth: 1950, Cheyenne, Wyoming
Colleges attended: University of Wyoming; Bachelor of Science in Recreation, master's degree in Business Management
Joined the YMCA as CEO: 1999
Favorite charity: The YMCA
Family: Married to Mary; daughter Bridgette (attends Loyola Marymount University), son Peter (attends the Barrett Honors College at ASU)
Favorite Arizona Destination: Sedona

WITH GEORGE SCOBAS

MyLIFE: Do you see some of those values missing in the workplace today?

Scobas: Yes. I think one thing I've noticed that's missing is loyalty. There really isn't a lot of loyalty between people and corporations or companies anymore. I think it's just that a lot of the young generation is restless. They like change. I think it might be because of technology. They want instant gratification. They don't want to wait to get the job they've been aspiring to. I've been at the Y for 39 years and started as a ski instructor at the Cheyenne, Wyoming YMCA—probably was making about $5,500 a year. But kids who work for me at the Y now, they want my job after a year. They feel entitled to move up quickly and not pay the dues that a lot of us had to pay when we were growing up. And maybe that's OK, if they have the talent and the urge to do that. For the Y when I started, there was a lot of loyalty. And right now there's not a lot. They're not looking for a long-term commitment. They're always looking. So, they start with one or two companies and when they find something better, they move on. We've got to challenge them.

MyLIFE: What is your vision for the Valley of the Sun YMCA over the coming years?

Scobas: I don't think we're really the Valley of the Sun YMCA anymore. I have branches in Flagstaff, Yuma, Prescott and Pinal County. The name probably needs to change. I have 22 branches across Arizona. I broke down some of our challenges into three categories. How do we build upon our core business? How do we go out in each and every one of our communities and find out what their needs are? You can go into different communities and find different needs. I can go to South Mountain, Maryvale, Scottsdale or Desert Foothills, and there are different needs in those communities. So, as a leader of the Y, I have to make sure that we do our homework. I was at the Chandler School District about a month ago and they mentioned that there are probably about 150 kids in the school district who are homeless. When you look at Chandler it seems like a well-to-do community, but there are over 100 families and kids that are homeless. How do you help those kids who really need food or shelter—basic necessities? The Y has to find those pockets of need and really service that community. That's one area to build our core business.

The other one is to develop new markets. We need to do better at reaching the Hispanic market. We also have a huge Native American Indian population. We've had tribes that have come to us and needed the Y to help them with health and wellness. They've built beautiful facilities but don't really know how to operate them. So, the Y can also help and educate in that area. How do we really work with elementary schools? When I went to school, we had a PE program. Now, we have recess. We try to help them with their curriculum. I think our biggest success right now is our partnership model. We have a lot of great partners. For example, we're partnering with ASU. You probably saw the new building right next door to us. That will be their new recreation center. We're going be combined, so our members can use their center and students can use our center. We're working with Freeport-McMoran, where we design and manage their wellness center. And we're working with Maricopa County and others to help them with their wellness programs.

We are also working on financial development. We have to be leaders in the community and philanthropic. We can't do the work unless we raise dollars. We raise about $3 million a year—and that's for all of our branches. With that, no person is denied the opportunity to participate in any of our programs. If you come in and you're making $10,000, you would get a scholarship from us. And if you make $40,000, there might be a co-pay. So, we don't deny anybody. We have two educational programs that we started ourselves. We have an i-LEARN program, which is for kids who can't make it in a traditional high school. They come to our YMCA during the day with teachers through a virtual online education program. We also have the Las Artes program, which is a program for kids who are at risk for doing jail time, and we've been able to get them back into the YMCA to get their GEDs through the arts. We graduated 180 last summer. We're bridging the gap. That's why financial development is important.

MyLIFE: Any closing remarks?

Scobas: A lot of people think the Y is a gym-and-swim, that we don't do any social service programs. We have 26 social service programs, from pre-K childcare to independent living and outreach services for seniors. From first offender programs to our Model UN [United Nations] program. We also have a civics and state legislature program. We have a public arts program. We have a dropout intervention program and cultural exchanges with Mexico. We have military outreach programs and diabetes prevention programs. That's the YMCA that people don't know. We have to do a better job of sharing our three pillars, which are Youth Development, Healthy Living and Social Responsibility. Though our fundraising efforts, we have to get the word out on those 26 programs we offer. ■