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For Immediate Release:

YMCA OF METROPOLITAN MILWAUKEE CELEBRATES 150 YEARS OF BUILDING STRONG KIDS, STRONG FAMILIES, AND STRONG COMMUNITIES

MILWAUKEE (September 30, 2008) – The YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee celebrates a major milestone today. On September 30, 1858, the first meeting of the Young Men’s Christian Association was held at the Plymouth Congregational Church at North Milwaukee and East Wells Streets. Nearly 120 young men were present for that first general meeting. Today marks the 150th anniversary of that meeting and the founding of the first YMCA in Milwaukee.

In honor of the 150th anniversary of the founding of that first YMCA, Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett proclaimed Tuesday, September 30, 2008, “YMCA Day” in Milwaukee. Mayor Barrett read the proclamation at a news conference at the Northside YMCA, 1350 W. North Ave., one of five YMCA branches currently located in the city of Milwaukee. He was joined by YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee President and CEO Bob Yamachika, who revealed a series of celebrations at the YMCA’s 11 branch locations. Others in attendance at the celebration include board and community members and more than 500 students from the YMCA Young Leaders Academy Charter School, who led the crowd in the YMCA dance.

“The YMCA has been an asset to the community since its earliest days in Milwaukee,” said Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett. “We are fortunate to have such a solid, committed partner in the YMCA and we look forward to the next 150 years, and beyond, with them.”

“We are proud of the 150 years of service we have provided to the Milwaukee community,” said Bob Yamachika, President and CEO of the YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee. “The YMCA is continually looking at the ever-changing needs of our community and working to meet those needs through all of our programs and services.”

The YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee will hold “Open Houses” at each of the 11 membership branch locations throughout the Milwaukee area on September 30th. The community is invited to stop in and join the celebration. Additionally, the YMCA has posted 150 promises to its members in branches and on the website www.ymcamke.org/150promises. There will also be teams from each YMCA branch out in the community handing out 150 surprises (1650 total) ranging from free t-shirts to a free month of membership.

Following its founding in 1858, the YMCA operated out of various churches and rented rooms for nearly 30 years, providing a place to gather, fellowship, and a safe haven to men who recently moved to the city. Friday night lectures were held with an emphasis on character building, duty, and spiritual guidance. The first permanent YMCA building opened on January 1, 1887 at 433 North 4th Street. That building housed the first swimming pool built in the state of Wisconsin.

Camping trips were organized for city boys during the summer. In 1891, a group of Milwaukee Y boys and their leaders set out in wagons for Lake Five in Menomonee Falls. The group spent two weeks at camp, representing the first organized resident camp in the state. The YMCA now operates two resident camps, Camp Minikani in Hubertus and Camp Matawa in Campbellsport. Day camp programs are also offered throughout the summer at many YMCA branches and at other satellite locations around the metropolitan Milwaukee area.

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The Milwaukee YMCA reached out to the immigrant community, teaching English along with other subjects like spelling, shorthand, bookkeeping, commerce, and mechanical drawing at night schools. It prepared immigrants for citizenship through Americanization classes. A German YMCA was organized in the late 1870s, and eventually merged with the Milwaukee Association.

The first gymnasium in the state was at the Milwaukee YMCA. Small classes for men and boys were held in a large room with pieces of gymnastic equipment. Calisthenics, weights, vaults, and punching bags were all used to help people get into physical shape. Those exercises helped illustrate the importance of growing strong in spirit, mind, and body.

Today, the YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee provides service to more than 160,000 people every year at our 11 membership branches, three full-day child care centers, two resident camps, a K4-8 charter school, and dozens of afterschool sites.

On the web: <http://www.ymcamke.org>

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The YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee builds strong kids, strong families, and strong communities. Since 1858, Milwaukee YMCAs have helped kids and families live healthy lives in spirit, mind and body. Supported in part through contributions to the Strong Kids Campaign, the YMCA provides membership assistance and scholarships to programs like summer camp, child care, and teen activities, so that no one is turned away due to an inability to pay.