

## □ New brand announced: Harold Mezile North Community YMCA Youth and Teen Enrichment Center

Written by Lydia Schwartz

Wednesday, 14 May 2014 16:00

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May 10, 2014—The North Community YMCA Youth and Teen Enrichment Center, located at 1711 West Broadway Avenue in North Minneapolis, is one of the only YMCA facilities in the country dedicated solely to serving children and youth. On May 10, the facility was renamed the Harold Mezile North Community YMCA Youth and Teen Enrichment Center, to include the name of the man who played an essential role in its creation. Newly-elected Minneapolis Mayor Betsy Hodges, who was unable to attend the ceremony, also passed along a proclamation officially declaring May 10th as Harold Mezile Day in the City of Minneapolis.

In addition to changing the name of the building, the YMCA of the Greater Twin Cities has established the Harold Mezile YMCA Urban Youth Impact Fund, a current-use fund that will support the YMCA's work with underserved children and youth in North Minneapolis and across the Twin Cities. "There is no higher honor in the YMCA than the one that you all are giving me today," Mezile said. "I believe that if I can help somebody as I pass your way, then I want to make a difference and live a life of significance. I want to have an impact on the youth of my community who are having a troubling, extremely hard time."

Mezile, said his supporters, has an unwavering commitment to helping all young people reach their full potential and the decision to change the name of the youth center underscores the YMCA's continuing dedication to youth development. Gary Cunningham, Vice President and Chief Program Officer of the Northwest Area Foundation, highlighted the importance of adding Mezile's name to the facility at the renaming ceremony. "This is permanent," he said. "The name is going to go on and on beyond all of us being here today because we get to honor him in memorial as we put the name on this building. Without the leadership of Harold Mezile, thousands of children would not have found their success."

The facility, which opened in 2009, offers academic support programs, after school and summer activities, leadership training, music and arts opportunities, swim programs, and more to local children, youth and teens. Matt Kjorstad, the current Executive Director of the now-named Harold Mezile North Community YMCA Youth and Teen Enrichment Center, spoke to Mezile's continuing legacy of dedication to serving the youth of Minneapolis' north side. "Most of us are here from sun up to sun down, and now this building is being renamed after [the man] from whom I've learned everything I know," Kjorstad said. "Every day when young people come into this space, they are simply coming to be young person. This is their Y, a young peoples' Y. This

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place has had an incredible impact on this community. People come to the North Side to come here, and we're proud of that."

Stacey Guilfoyle, a Youth Support Specialist for the YMCA's Intervention Services in the Twin Cities, is just one of many of Mezile's success stories. She spoke to the importance of seeing a person of color at the top of an organization and its impact on herself and her peers. "This is more than just a building," Guilfoyle said. "[Mezile would] jump right into activities with us and would talk to us about our interests and education goals. Now it's our turn to continue to reflect his legacy... Driving by on West Broadway everyday will now be a reminder of how far we've come, and of how far we have to go."

Mezile led a number of local and national youth development efforts during his 40-year career with the YMCA, leading in Minneapolis from 1995 until his retirement in 2012. "[I have had that] burning passion since my very first day in Kansas City to see young people succeed in life," Mezile said. "We want our children to graduate from high school and be ready to succeed. Education is the bridge to success that changes lives