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SALEM NON-PROFITS

Sinatra prepares to lead YMCA into what he sees as a bright future

With new building to rise, the Salem YMCA also readies for new leadership. Tim Sinatra is no stranger to Salem nonprofits, and he's ambitious to see the Y provide even more services to Salem families.

By Kate McMahon - Special to Salem Reporter

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Tim Sinatra, right, incoming interim CEO of the Family YMCA of Marion and Polk Counties, and Sam Carroll, current CEO, stand outside of the new YMCA site in Salem on Wednesday, July 1. (Amanda Loman/Salem Reporter)

Many people have a hard time planning one year ahead, let alone making decisions that will benefit seven generations into the future.

But for Tim Sinatra, “seven generation thinking” is exactly what drew him away from a high-level government job back to the YMCA - where he got his first job.

On July 16, Sinatra will become the new interim CEO of the Family YMCA of Marion and Polk counties.

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Sinatra grew up Hollywood, Florida, a middle-class suburban community where he and his three brothers played in the neighborhoods. He said his hometown always felt like it was a decade behind its big city peers, Miami and Fort Lauderdale.

When he was 18, he moved out and started looking for a job. He had heard that the YMCA was a great place to work and landed a summer job as a camp counselor. It was during that summer that he realized his purpose in life was to serve, inspiring him to forge a career in nonprofits.

“By chance, I found my ‘why’ at the Y,” Sinatra said. “And I spent the next 32 years really serving families and communities to help them be their best.”

He went on to study sociology at University of North Carolina at Asheville and received his MBA at Florida Atlantic University. From there, he worked for nonprofits, holding executive director positions at three Boys & Girls Clubs in as many states.

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But in 2017, he left the nonprofit world to take a state job in Oregon.

Sinatra is currently wrapping up as director of organizational development at the Oregon Department of Human Services where he has worked for three years. He was approached this spring about taking the helm of the YMCA as it enters a major transition.

“YMCA was a foundational launchpad for my career in nonprofits. It’s funny that it’s come around full circle, and

now I've come back to apply what I've learned to give back to the Y," Sinatra said.

The "Y" is located on Southeast Ferry Street in downtown Salem and was shuttered earlier this year to make way for a new building.

Sinatra walks into a big task – raising another \$7 million to top off a capital campaign to pay for the building.

"That fundraising will be a major focus of mine, but I will also oversee the integrity of the building design to ensure it will meet critical services of the community," Sinatra said.

Sinatra will make sure that the new building stays faithful to include convening spaces, health and wellness services and social opportunities. He'll also manage the project to stay on its timeline and meet financial obligations to be ready to open in December of 2021.

"We want to open with great momentum into the future - and the community will feel the impact," he said.

Sinatra has always loved the YMCA's principles of caring for others, integrity and consistency. He deeply respects the organization for being open to all and caring for anyone, no matter who they are or what faith they follow.

"In this day and age, having an organization open to everyone is so important to the health of our nation. So, there's a great path ahead," he said.



Sam Carroll, CEO of the Family YMCA of Marion and Polk Counties. (Amanda Loman/Salem Reporter)

Sam Carroll, who has been the YMCA CEO in Salem since 2014, spearheaded the downtown Y's recovery project. He recognized early on that the condition of the nearly 100-year-old building was unsustainable and the nonprofit's finances were in shambles.

"We had no cash reserves, no operating reserves and tremendous debt," Carroll said. "We cleared the debt and paid off the bills on time. It was quite an accomplishment."

Oregon Lottery funds followed, and enabled Carroll to launch the capital campaign.

But just months before construction was to begin, Carroll started thinking about the future - asking himself, as he neared retirement age, if he should stay through the end of the construction project or bring in new blood for a fresh start.

Then, the coronavirus pandemic hit and thrust Carroll into a new rescue effort when the Salem-Keizer Education Foundation dissolved.

As part of that, the Y took on the foundation's Awesome Youth Sports, Tuition-Based childcare, and Summer Camp programs.

"I positioned the Y to be successful but wanted to be fair to the organization long term," Carroll said. Bringing Tim on board now gives the Y that long-term ability. He's a strategic, innovative thinker. He's just great."

Carroll met Sinatra when Sinatra was executive director of Boys & Girls Club in Salem, prior to working for DHS.

"I say there are three things that Tim is: he's better looking, younger and smarter than I am. So how could go wrong with that? He's just so talented. I've always been impressed with his book of work. His work with DHS has been remarkable," Carroll said.

Carroll will work alongside Sinatra for three months and officially make the hand-off in October.

At DHS, Sinatra his job was about making connections. For example, he worked with a software engineer for 18 months to build the Community Resource Network to connect those who need services such as child early learning with those who can provide that help. The first such network was launched in Marion County and another for eastern Oregon will follow soon.

Sinatra's tenure at DHS is one reason Carroll tapped him as his successor. His position at DHS exposed him to deeper needs in the community that he had not seen before. He kept this in mind as he considered the YMCA position.

"I realized how much more effective I can be at the Y. I can be more intentional to support all of the community," he said.

As CEO of the YMCA, Sinatra wants to zero in on providing free programs to foster families. The Salem YMCA has already done that for about 70 families and will continue to do so under Sinatra's leadership.

"One of the main focuses of the Y is strengthening families - and the family unit, whatever that looks like - creates a stronger community," he said. "We'll look to partners, and what our members want. And then we'll design programs appropriately to match the need."

He also wants the YMCA to address education, housing, childcare and employment opportunities for teenagers.

But at its core, the YMCA serves families.

"There are so many challenges and distractions that prevent families from spending time together," he said.

"So, the YMCA can help families connect at a higher level, like providing basics on parenting skills, fun activities and creating family social networks so families can lean on each other."

He wants the YMCA to be a hub where families can do yoga together, practice mindfulness and nutrition classes – and enjoy outdoor experiences.

"A lot families are afraid to go outdoors - of getting lost. So we'll connect with different types of communities like cycling and running to create little clubs to help families who are new to that," Sinatra said. "There will always be someone there to support them, so if something goes south, we will be there to help. Making those experiences comfortable and safe and using our natural resources to not only bond as a family, but also get healthy."

The Salem Family YMCA has served the community in "spirit, mind, and body" since 1892, and the coronavirus is not the first pandemic or economic crisis that it has

endured. The new building will open with Sinatra's vision for its future. But, he says, in the end, the Y is not the building. The Y is a philosophy of how people care for each other.

"When you look back through history, the organizations that survived are the ones that really built a strong foundation," Sinatra said. "With current circumstances across the nation, having the YMCA there, we can have discussions on these types of challenges, and we can be a hub - a convener to bring everyone together."



Tim Sinatra, incoming interim CEO of the Family YMCA of Marion and Polk Counties. (Amanda Loman/Salem Reporter)

He's excited to get started.

"My wife says it the best: 'When you work with a nonprofit it's 24/7.' But that's not a bad thing. You love what you do. You get to see different team members, clients wherever you go. I'm always looking for opportunities to add value and make a difference."

Over the years, Sinatra has had many offers from for-profit companies, but never made the switch.

"I always say that I love Mondays. Every time I got the opportunity to go to a company and make more money, I never thought I'd be excited to go to work every day for a big paycheck. I'm interested in watching a community build its resilience - that's my success," he said.

Sinatra and his wife do not have children of their own but consider themselves blessed to serve children and their families all their lives. He loves mountain biking and finds the peace of a forest settles his body, mind and soul. Every Tuesday he gathers with a group of men for Bible studies.

"What I love is that the Y's foundational principles are based on Christian faith and when you strip down to the fundamentals of Christian faith, it's about caring for others integrity and consistency," he said. "The essence of an organization that does that, is open to everyone and is stepping forward in challenging times is key because it's all about how you distinguish yourself not in the good times, but how you move forward in the most challenging times."

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