

# MERGE

From A1

"Everyone recognizes the YMCA's primary purpose is in providing recreation and adult education services," Zelei said.

The SE-L schools and the two cities combine to contribute about \$105,000 each year to SELREC.

The largest portion of that comes from the school board, which pays about \$43,000. South Euclid and Lyndhurst contribute about \$37,000 and \$25,000, respectively.

## 18-month transition

The plan is for the Hillcrest YMCA, at 5000 Mayfield Road, Lyndhurst, to be financially responsible for operating SELREC, including an 18-month transition period.

During that 18-month period, the three entities also will continue to pay their subsidies, not to exceed a total of \$155,933, but then their financial responsibility ends.

Zelei said he expects the 18-month period to start in June or July.

Under the proposal, the Hillcrest YMCA would operate SELREC's child care program. Staffing practices would follow YMCA policies and procedures.

"There's not a lot for me to say until the agreement is approved by all three parties," said Glenn Haley, president and CEO of the YMCA of Greater Cleveland.

"It's an idea we think makes sense for a unique collaboration and partnership between the two cities, the school board and the YMCA. It's an opportunity to bring some efficiency to the operation which is SELREC."

Rick Dula, director of SELREC, also sees the proposal as a collaboration or partnership, "not really a merger."

"It's not a takeover; everything will still be there," Dula

said. "It just allows the YMCA to be in charge of the administration of the programs that comprise SELREC."

Dula, in his 16th year as SELREC director, said he's not sure about his future with SELREC or that of his staff, or where the SELREC office will be housed.

Haley said those decisions have not been made yet.

"It's a way of keeping SELREC around," Dula said. "I think it's the best choice for attaining success and continuing SELREC as an entity, in collaboration with the YMCA."

## 'Win-win situation'

Lyndhurst Ward 4 Councilman Patrick Ward said his council approved the funding for the 18-month subsidy period when its Finance Committee met Feb. 22. No formal vote by council was needed to give Mayor Joseph Cicero the go-ahead to sign the memorandum of understanding, Ward said.

"This is something we have been interested in for some time," Ward said.

"There's a long-term interest in SELREC being self-sustaining, and this is a good means to that end. It will broaden the Y's offerings and broaden access to residents and could lead to a stronger YMCA in our area."

Cicero said he sees the proposed merger as "a win-win situation for the Y and for the two cities."

"SELREC will always be SELREC, but the Y will be the operational entity," he said.

Keith Benjamin, South Euclid's director of community services, said he also supports the idea of the YMCA becoming the manager of SELREC programs.

"We look forward to having our city council consider the memorandum of understanding regarding the merger," he said. "I think it's very positive for the residents of South Euclid and Lyndhurst and Uni-

versity Heights as well."

SELREC programs have been made available to University Heights residents, at slightly higher fees, in recent years.

## 'Different way' needed

Bill Kent, president of the SE-L school board, said two board members, Zelei, Cicero and representatives from both city councils met in early February to discuss this issue.

"The consensus was because it's been difficult (for each entity) to fund the subsidy, to keep SELREC around, we need a different way to fund it and operate it," Kent said.

"All the entities agreed this was the way to go to keep SELREC's programs going for our community."

Kent said the three entities hope the YMCA, with its experience and resources, can "do some bigger and better things" with SELREC.

"It's (the YMCA's) business," he said. "They know how to run recreation facilities and programs."

The YMCA has done cooperative programming with other community recreation programs in the past. Zelei noted, citing Lakewood and Avon as examples.

"YMCAs have been doing this across the country," Haley said.

## SELREC struggling

Zelei said SELREC has been struggling financially in recent years.

"I think the economy has impacted SELREC, in both recreation and adult education programming, and also in child care and summer camps," he said.

Another factor, Zelei said, has been the consolidation of schools in the SE-L district. Within the past three years, the district has closed three elementary schools, leaving just three K-3 schools.

"If you look back at SELREC's books maybe four years ago, SELREC had a pretty solid carry-over every year of \$300,000 to \$400,000 and was able to add to that carry-over," Zelei said.

"But by the end of this year, there won't be anything left in (SELREC's) bank account. Either SELREC would have to find a way to reduce expenses, or the two cities and

the school district would have to contribute more to the subsidy."

The economy is impacting all three entities as well, Zelei said.

"So we have less money to contribute as a subsidy, and SELREC has less money coming in," he said. "They're receiving less revenue because they have fewer people participating in the programs."

## Major programs down

Dula said SELREC's two

major programs — before- and after-school child care and summer day camp — have suffered in recent years.

"People have lost jobs or have had hours cut back," he said. "If money is tight, maybe mom or dad stays home to watch the children. It affects revenues."

Dula added the \$105,000 SELREC receives each year from the three entities is just a small percentage of its funding.

"During our heyday five or six years ago, we took in over \$1 million annually," he said. "Now it's closer to \$700,000."

"It was a heck of a deal for the three entities, to get what SELREC is providing."

SELREC has been in existence since 1946. Its office has been at 4843 Mayfield Road in Lyndhurst for 20 years.

"Hopefully this (plan) will work out," Dula said.

Staff writer Jeff Piorkowski contributed to this story.

# SELREC, YMCA likely to merge

## Hillcrest Y would assume operations of SELREC programs under proposal

By Ed Wittenberg  
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**LYNDHURST** — South Euclid-Lyndhurst Recreation and the YMCA of Greater Cleveland are expected to reach an agreement this year that will allow the YMCA to assume operation of SELREC programs.

On Feb. 23, the South Euclid-Lyndhurst Board of Education approved a memorandum of understanding between itself, the cities of South Euclid and Lyndhurst and the YMCA for the merger of SELREC and the YMCA.

The two city councils must give their mayors consent to sign the memorandum as well. Lyndhurst council took that step last week, and South Euclid council is expected to decide in the coming weeks.

William Zelei, superintendent of South Euclid-Lyndhurst schools, said the main goal of the merger is to reduce costs for the three entities that have been subsidizing SELREC, while allowing SELREC to continue to offer recreation and adult education services to the community.

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