

Outside the Box: James Morton comes full circle to push the Y into the 21st Century

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James Morton, president and CEO of the YMCA of Greater Boston.

Age: 61

Education: Bachelor's degree, University of Wisconsin Madison, 1977; law degree, [Northeastern University](#), 1981

Residence: Boston

[James Morton](#), president of the Greater Boston YMCA since April, is not one to rest on his laurels. A successful stint at the Springfield YMCA led him to the top job at the Hartford chapter in 2010; now he's hit the ground running in Boston, hoping to do even more good at the helm of a much larger organization.

The Boston chapter has 125,000 members across 13 locations, representing 2.2 million visits annually and an \$80 million annual budget.

Morton is particularly proud of YMCA Training Inc., a job skills program with an 80 percent placement rate and 4,500 graduates to date who collectively earned \$95.5 million last year. More than 200 local companies now partner with the program to provide internship opportunities.

He also likes to highlight the work his chapter does for kids. Some 15,000 teenagers around Boston get free memberships during the summer, and the local Y provided 489,000 free meals to young members from low-income homes.

Morton recently talked with Business Journal correspondent [Brian Hoefling](#) about his first year in Boston and his plans for the local YMCA.

What prompted you to take this position and move to Boston?

What I hope to do in my role in the YMCA is to make a difference and have an impact on the lives of children and families. And the YMCA of Greater Boston, because of its size, gave me the greatest opportunity to have the greatest impact.

What's the biggest misconception about the Y?

Historically the YMCA is recognized as a swim, gym and camp organization. And while we're proud of that tradition and that legacy, we also think that YMCA is an organization that leans into some of the greatest challenges that impact our community, issues like disparities in health, the achievement gap, and the prevention of youth violence.

How does the YMCA tackle the achievement gap?

It is said that 70 percent of the achievement gap occurs because of what's called the "summer slide," where low-income children don't have the same stimulation during the summer. They lose math and reading skills during the summer as a result of that lack of stimulation. So one of our goals as an organization is to make sure that we provide them with opportunities.

You went to Northeastern. How does it feel to run the organization that served as its incubator?

There's great pleasure in having been a student at Northeastern and finding myself, 30 years later, two blocks away from where I took law school classes. Northeastern was a law school committed to providing lawyers committed to positive social change and I believe that, in my role here at the YMCA, I get to work for an organization of staff and volunteers committed to positive social change.

What uniquely 21st-century challenges does the Greater Boston YMCA face?

I think the challenge is making certain that we are engaging millennials in a way that connects with their passions and their commitment to social impact, while at the same time recognizing that they are not a group that is generally interested in joining or becoming members of an organization.

Where would you like to see this organization in five years?

I hope that ... we're feeding more children, we're keeping more teens safe, we're providing more jobs that pay a livable wage; that we have significantly reduced the achievement gap; and that not only are we the largest provider of educational services, but that we are a provider of high-quality educational services.

<http://www.bizjournals.com/boston/print-edition/2016/03/11/outside-the-box-james-morton-comes-full-circle-to.html>