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Up against the wall

Activity promotes eye-hand coordination as well as fitness benefits.

By JANIE BLANKENSHIP
Special to The Star

Brendan Safley likes a challenge when he works out. That's why he finds himself using the Sports Wall at Cleaver Family YMCA.

At only 4 years old, he's able to give his 6-year-old brother, Colin, some competition. The Safley boys take advantage of the gymnasium when their mom, Laura, is taking classes.

"We come here about three or four times a week," Laura Safley said. "I like that there is an indoor play structure for the kids."

The Cleaver Y, which opened last March at 7000 Troost Ave., features activities like the Sports Wall for people of all ages. Joe Moore, membership director, says this workout wall is perfect for developing hand/eye



CHRIS CUMMINS | SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Children at the Cleaver Family YMCA play at the sports wall, which uses flashing lights and padded sensors for games and competition. The high-tech activity equipment is designed to keep kids' interest.



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coordination.

Here's how it works: Lights on the wall go off and the participant must hit each one as it lights up before the buzzer sounds. It involves jumping or reaching high, while getting the lower lights with the knees and legs.

Sometimes the kids use swim noodles or basketballs to shake things up. Other times they hit the lights in a relay fashion. Moore said the wall also is used for sports training and that offers exercise to anyone.

"Childhood obesity is such a problem in the U.S.," Moore said. "We're just trying to do what we can to help, while keeping it fun."

Beth McCarthy said her children, Brady and Katie, enjoy playing at the gym but say the wall is their favorite activity.

"I think it might be hard to get them to do anything else because the wall is a lot of fun," said McCarthy, who works out at the YMCA several times a week.

Members age 9-17 have a designated area called Generation Zone. During the school year, it opens at 3 p.m. and is popular with the after-school crowd. It is not open on the weekends because of facility rentals.

Features include Dance Dance Revolution, and, Moore said, sometimes there are dance-offs.

A large-screen television and computers also are available. Moore said he has found the video cycle to be a hot item among the Generation Zone kids, as well. Stationary bikes are hooked up to video games and the only way to get the game to start is to pedal the bike.

Aside from the hi-tech equipment, Moore said that Generation Zone offers Youth in Government, a book club, homework assistance and college speakers. Surprisingly, he said he sometimes find the kids playing "good old-fashioned" board games.

"What we have done through Generation Zone is offer kids a structured hang out place," Moore said. "They all seem to have a good time and they are being

CHRIS CUMMINS | SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Patrick Carr, 6, used a foam swimming noodle to hit flashing lights on the new sports wall at the Cleaver Family YMCA.



CHRIS CUMMINS | SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Grace Wheeler, 6, jumped on a floor scooter during a race at the Cleaver Family YMCA.

The skinny

For more information, call the Cleaver YMCA at (816) 285-9622.



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