

FEATURED EDITORIAL

Toledo youth need more

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Deyondre Rivers, left, climbs a pool ladder as Dajaun Turner, right, dives into the pool at the Willys Pool in Toledo last year.

THE BLADE

Toledo officials are once again turning to private donors to help operate the city's swimming pools this summer. But to truly move the city forward, officials should dive deeper and give the city's youth pools and much more.

The city is now apparently fat with cash — officials having discovered millions of dollars in recent weeks that they didn't previously expect or know about. (Or so we are told.)

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So, let us, as a city, do some good and meet some obligations. And let's be clear that this is the *city government's* obligation.

It was one thing to tap corporate donors to pay for pools when the city had no money for them, but now it is time for the city to accept its responsibilities again.



Deyondre Rivers, left, climbs a pool ladder as Dajaun Turner, right, dives into the pool at the Willys Pool in Toledo last year.

In 2014, then-Mayor D. Michael Collins did not include any money to open the city's swimming pools in his city budget. Not only did the city not have enough money to operate the pools, the facilities needed about \$50,000 in repairs, Mr. Collins said. This, along with low attendance figures from the previous summer, convinced the mayor that pools should not be a priority.

Following a public outcry over the prospect of a summer without pools, tradesmen and other community members volunteered to make necessary repairs. City council found about \$75,000 in the budget to pay to operate the pools for at least part of the summer. The community applauded the efforts of the public-private partnership to save the swimming pools — important community assets.

That process repeated itself, more or less, in 2015 and 2016, with the city tapping private donors for the money to open the pools for a portion of the summer.

This effort was laudable, but it is time for Toledo to step up and not only fund the pools, but make them part of a broad and deep summer recreation program for youth. Instead of being an afterthought or a budgetary extra, an enriching program of outdoor activities for Toledo's young people should be a priority.

Let's study other cities for best practices and survey Toledo families to design a program that appeals to the city's children and teens: Explore activities that will expand their horizons and teach them valuable life skills.

A well planned and properly funded summer rec program would give the city's youth a constructive way to spend their summer vacation. It would offer choices — from martial arts to chess. It would compete with gangs. It would embrace the lives of kids the city is surely as responsible for as its streets. These youngsters have been just as badly neglected as our streets.