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Opinion

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EDITORIAL

HealthPark an example of vision

There is little doubt today that the Owensboro Medical Health System's HealthPark has become one of Owensboro's greatest assets over the last decade.

Since it opened in 1998, membership has grown from around 900 to 4,500.

The number of programs has tripled over that time, and services have evolved to offer support for the young and old alike.

Most important, the HealthPark has been one of the leaders in changing the culture of this community to where we focus now as much on preventive medicine and education as we do treating existing problems.

But beyond all these achievements is another success story that shouldn't be ignored — the HealthPark is an example of what can happen when a community quits clutching to the past, allows itself to dream and takes a chance on an ambitious idea, even if it's met with initial resistance.

It's hard to imagine finding many negatives with the HealthPark today, but that certainly wasn't always the case. When the idea was first proposed, hospital officials faced backlash from both residents and some elected officials.

Part of that opposition was driven by people who were still upset over the merger between

the old Mercy Hospital and the Owensboro-Daviess County Hospital.

The idea of tearing down Mercy Hospital and replacing it with a state-of-the-art fitness center was just more salt in the wounds for those who believed Owensboro was better off with two hospitals.

But it's hard to argue that decision today when one looks at the success of both the HealthPark and the consolidated Owensboro Medical Health System.

There was also an undercurrent of resentment that somehow the facility would only be a "playground for the rich." This newspaper even fell into that trap.

On July 14, 1998, we

published an editorial criticizing the cost of membership, which we coupled with a locally drawn editorial cartoon. That cartoon showed a mock design of the HealthPark, which included the "Fortune 500 Swim Pavilion," the "Donald Trump Training Center," "BMW and Mercedes Parking" and the "Oprah Aerobics and Book Club."

Frankly, those comments seem rather silly now when one looks at the number of people who've benefited from that facility, whether it be through rehabilitation from a medical procedure, companionship from a support group of breast cancer survivors or education on how to eat better and live healthier.

We're lucky to have a place that promotes wellness, both physically and mentally.

But when local leaders look at the HealthPark, we hope they see more than a fitness center. Just as when they look at the David C. Adkisson Greenbelt Park, we hope they see more than a walking track; or when they look at the RiverPark Center, they see more than a performing arts center. And there are likely other examples as well.

Instead, we hope they see how a community benefits when vision trumps negativity and the fear of change — or how it becomes stagnant when such ideas are stifled.