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**NORTH SUBURBAN
YMCA**
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**NSYMCA Unveils New Lobby Coffee Bar to
Create Jobs for Special Needs Community**

Community Partnerships Offer Vocational Training and Employment.

Northbrook, IL: October, 2021 – The North Suburban YMCA announced the grand opening of Café Voca, a new coffee bar that provides vocational training and employment experience for individuals with intellectual and developmental challenges. Café Voca was developed in partnership with the Rotary Club of Chicagoland Korean-Northbrook (RCCKN) through a global grant from Rotary International, and partnerships with Autism Workforce, Healthy Choice Vending, and the Wheat Mission, a community organization that provides recreation to individuals with special needs in the Korean Community. Grants and community donations will sustain the program for the future.

“We felt the NSYMCA was the ideal partner given the breadth and success of their special services programming,” said Dr. John Kim, RCCKN former Grant Committee Chair. John started the initial project with Former NSYMCA CEO Howard Schultz and Ellen Mirochnick, NSYMCA Special Services Coordinator. The Reverend Sunju Choi Chong, the new Grant Committee Chair for the RCKKN, will oversee the grant process going forward.

Officially opening on September 20, Café Voca, located in the Y’s lobby, serves coffee and hot chocolate Monday through Fridays from 9-11am. The beverages are free and donations are accepted. An official ribbon cutting was held on Oct 6th that was attended by the Café partners and supporters, The RCCKN, Northbrook Rotary Club and Rotary district leaders, Rotary International, and local legislators, including Senator Laura Fine.

Café Voca's trainees are currently recruited from the Wheat Mission and the TruNorth transition program, formerly NSSD, with plans to expand employment opportunities as well as the café offerings. "This project is so much more than just serving coffee. For many of these individuals, this is their first job and experience in the workforce, and our ultimate goal will be to achieve gainful employment for our participants," said Ellen Mirochnick, Special Services Coordinator at the NSYMCA. The hands-on training is provided by Autism Workforce, the employment training arm of the Exercise Connection. The Korean Rotary Club of Northbrook will help with translation services, mentorship, and job placement within the local community.

"We are so proud of Nathan being able to follow the directions and do so well on the first day," commented Hyeok Choi, one of the participants' mothers. "It was so wonderful to see him motivated and proud of himself as well. Today was my birthday. I feel like I just received the greatest birthday present ever in my life."

"We are so grateful to the many people who helped make this project possible including John Kim and Justin Lee from the Korean Rotary Club, the many people at Rotary International, Rev. Nam from the Wheat Mission, and the Y staff for making this program come to life," said North Suburban YMCA's CEO Kathy Fielding. "The Northbrook Rotary Club has already committed some funding for the sustainability of the project and we look forward to engaging additional partners to sustain this project for its long-term success."

"The NSYMCA is a wonderful organization and we (The Northbrook Rotary Club) love supporting them with grants for programs like Café Voca. We felt sustainable funding was a perfect way to keep this amazing program strong through the years. What the Y does for the community is in-line with the mission of the Rotary Club and we are proud to support it," said Ron Knight, current President of the Northbrook Rotary Club.

For more information about the Café Voca program, contact North Suburban YMCA Special Services Coordinator Ellen Mirochnick at emirochnick@nsymca.org or (847) 272-7250 Ext. 1239.

About the [North Suburban YMCA](#)

The North Suburban YMCA services Northbrook and 14 surrounding communities with programs and tools that help its residents become healthier, more connected, and confident, ensuring that everyone, regardless of age, income, or background, has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive. The NSYMCA focuses on Youth Development, Healthy Living, and Social Responsibility and is a charitable organization, inclusive and welcoming to all in our community. Learn more at [NSYMCA.org](https://www.nsymca.org).



CAPTION: The North Suburban YMCA celebrated the grand opening of Café Voca, a new lobby coffee bar that provides vocational training and employment for individuals with special needs.



