Like many people, my life was influenced by the YMCA. I spent my junior high school years in Reading, where my widowed mother worked for the American Red Cross.

She signed me up for summer sessions at the Reading YMCA, which I spent at the main building in downtown Reading. That’s where I learned to swim.

There were no girls at the YMCA in the early 1960s, and everyone swam in the buff.

There were several categories of swimmers, as I recall, and I rose in proficiency from a Tadpole to a Flying Fish, whatever that was.

Just like Pottstown, Reading is totally walkable. I could easily walk to the YMCA by myself at any time I wanted. It was — and is — open long hours, weekdays and weekends, just like Pottstown.

I took a little tour of the Reading YMCA last week, which I’m pleased to say is using the same magnificent 1912 building I enjoyed as a youth.

The dingy basement swimming pool has been replaced by an 8-lane swimming pool with room for lots of bleachers to accommodate people watching swimming competitions.

The same gym I remember is still used, with a suspended metal walking track high up on the walls. The Y has added a second, larger gym.

There used to be a cafeteria and bowling alley, which have been replaced by racquetball courts, a fitness center, and aerobic studios.

There is also a teen center and a child care center.

The Y has 150 single occupancy rooms on its upper floors for homeless people, especially those recovering from drug addiction.

Last month, the Berks County District Attorney donated $100,000 in forfeited funds from illegal activities to the Reading YMCA to help people recovering from drug addiction.

It’s great to see that Reading has somehow kept up maintenance on a 100-year-old building and that it focuses on serving those in need.

What a contrast from Philadelphia Freedom Valley, which focuses on building lavish suburban facilities.

Commentary by Thomas Hylton

READING YMCA has served a diverse population for 160 years. Its current building in the heart of the downtown was constructed in 1912. It has an 8-lane swimming pool, two gyms, two fitness centers, and 150 single occupancy rooms on its upper floors to serve those in need. Professionals from the adjacent Berks County Courthouse and downtown office workers exercise in the same facility as low income residents — the kind of diversity the Y has historically sought to encourage.