

# A Full-Scale Fitness Solution for Active Aging in Rural Texas

PALACIOS, TX, UNITED STATES, May 7, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In a rural Texas coastal community where access to wellness resources can be limited, the YMCA has created something unexpected: a full-scale fitness center designed to support active aging at every level.

In Palacios, Texas, expectations for a community fitness center were modest. With a town population of roughly 1,200 and a broader service area made up of farmland and small coastal communities, most residents anticipated little more than a basic workout room.

Instead, they walked into a fully equipped YMCA express facility featuring commercial-grade strength and cardio equipment designed to support mobility, independence, and lifelong wellness. For many members, particularly older adults, the response was immediate and unanimous: This is a real gym.

The Palacios facility is part of the Calhoun County YMCA, which operates five locations and program centers across a wide geographic region stretching toward San Antonio and Houston.

While YMCA leadership had traditionally avoided opening facilities in communities under 5,000 residents, local leaders proposed a different approach that ultimately revealed just how essential access to fitness had become for this largely retirement-aged population.

“We weren’t planning to go into a community this small,” said Michele Morales, Regional Executive Director for the Calhoun County YMCA. “But once we saw the need, we realized this wasn’t about scale, it was about impact.”



Black flooring, neutral walls, and well-spaced equipment create a polished, contemporary feel, far from the “household gym” many residents anticipated.

Meeting a Hidden Community Need

The Palacios express gym was developed through a collaborative model: the community invested in equipment and minor building renovations, while the YMCA contributed funding and operational oversight. What began as a cautious pilot quickly became a vital wellness resource.

“We thought we were just meeting the bare necessities,” Morales said. “But once we opened the doors, it became clear the community really needed us, we just didn’t realize how much.”

With the next closest YMCA more than 30 miles away, retirement-aged residents had limited options for structured, safe, and accessible exercise. The new facility quickly reached 175 units of membership, representing more than 330 individual members in a town of approximately 1,200 residents.

#### Designing for Active Aging, Without Compromise

From the outset, the YMCA’s priority was to create a space that supported active aging without feeling clinical, limited, or scaled down. The equipment selection played a central role in achieving that balance.

The Palacios express gym is anchored by a comprehensive lineup of SportsArt ECO-NATURAL™ cardio equipment, including two Status ellipticals, two Elite ellipticals, three treadmills, three recumbent cycles, and two Status steppers. Together, the mix offers members multiple low-impact cardiovascular options, which is an essential consideration in a retirement-heavy community where joint health and balance are priorities.

The ellipticals provide smooth, biomechanically aligned motion paths that reduce joint stress while maintaining full-body engagement. Recumbent cycles offer supported seating and accessible step-through design, making them particularly appealing to members with limited mobility or balance concerns.

The treadmills feature wide decks and intuitive console layouts, supporting both steady-state walking and progressive conditioning programs. Even the step mills (often associated with high-intensity training) offer controlled, adjustable resistance suitable for varying ability levels.



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“Active aging doesn’t mean lowering expectations,” said Ruben Mejia, Executive Vice President of SportsArt Americas. “It means engineering equipment that supports joint integrity, stability, and confidence, while still delivering meaningful strength and cardiovascular outcomes. Older adults want to feel capable, not limited.”

The cardio selection is complemented by a robust strength-training footprint. The facility includes selectorized cable stations, a dual-function chin-up/dip unit, leg press and leg extension machines, lat pulldown and row stations, chest press, shoulder press, multi-press units, adjustable benches, dumbbells, kettlebells, medicine balls, and plate-loaded training options.

Rather than limiting the floor to light-duty machines, the YMCA intentionally included a full spectrum of strength modalities to support everything from basic resistance training to progressive overload for more advanced members.

“For older adults, strength training is not optional, it’s foundational,” Mejia said. “Maintaining muscle mass directly correlates to fall prevention, metabolic health, and long-term independence. When a facility invests in a complete strength offering, it sends a message that longevity matters.”

Ease of use was critical across both cardio and strength platforms. Clearly marked adjustments, smooth cable travel, accessible weight stacks, and ergonomic seating allow members to transition confidently between movements without frustration or intimidation.

Importantly, the equipment also delivers visual impact. Framed against black flooring and neutral walls, the sleek cardio units and strength machines create a professional training environment that immediately elevated member expectations.

“People expected something small and basic,” Morales said. “When they walked in and saw the space, they were genuinely surprised. They kept saying, ‘This is legit.’”

A Welcoming Space That Encourages Consistency



The cardio selection is complemented by a robust strength-training footprint, including selectorized cable stations.

The physical environment reinforces that sense of pride. Black flooring, neutral walls, and well-spaced equipment create a polished, contemporary feel, far from the “household gym” many residents anticipated.

Currently operating as an open gym, the Palacios location allows members to exercise at their own pace, and that is an important factor for retirees who value routine and independence.

For Mejia, that autonomy is a key component of long-term health.

“The goal isn’t just activity, it’s consistency,” he said. “When equipment feels intuitive and comfortable, members come back. That consistency is what protects mobility, reduces fall risk, and preserves independence.”

### Expanding Access Through Insurance Partnerships

Accessibility at the Palacios YMCA extends beyond design. Through agreements with multiple insurance providers, including Medicare Advantage plans, many older adults can access membership at little to no out-of-pocket cost.

“In many cases, their insurance covers the full cost of the membership,” Morales explained. “They might pay a little more in premiums, but they’re getting a gym membership that would normally cost \$30 a month.”

For retirees on fixed incomes, that model removes a significant barrier, transforming fitness from an optional expense into an essential health resource. “Communities like Palacios show why accessibility matters,” Mejia said. “When you combine smart equipment design with financial accessibility, you create a true wellness ecosystem.”

### A Model for Rural and Aging Communities

While the Palacios express gym is currently the only Calhoun County YMCA location outfitted almost entirely with SportsArt equipment, its success offers a replicable model for rural and retirement-focused communities nationwide.

“This showed us what’s possible,” Morales said. “When you give people the right environment and the right equipment, they show up.”

For the residents of Palacios, the gym has become more than a workout space. It’s a place to maintain independence, build routine, and stay connected, one strength session or low-impact cardio workout at a time.

And for SportsArt, it reinforces a broader industry shift. “The future of fitness isn’t just high performance,” Mejia said. “It’s inclusive performance that creates spaces where every generation

can train with confidence.”

For more information on SportsArt strength and cardio equipment, and accessories, visit [www.gosportsart.com](http://www.gosportsart.com).

### About SportsArt

With more than 40 years of innovative design and manufacturing excellence, SportsArt continues to lead the fitness industry through revolutionary sustainable solutions. Along with the world’s only line of energy-generating cardio equipment, ECO-POWR™, SportsArt also offers a full range of high-quality cardio, strength and rehabilitation equipment for the fitness, medical and residential markets. Known for its dedication to service, durability and cutting-edge technologies, SportsArt is one of the largest single brand manufacturers in the world with over 500,000 square feet of state-of-the-art space. The company designs, manufactures and tests all equipment in-house before it is sold in over 70 countries worldwide. For more information [visit gosportsart.com](http://www.gosportsart.com).

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