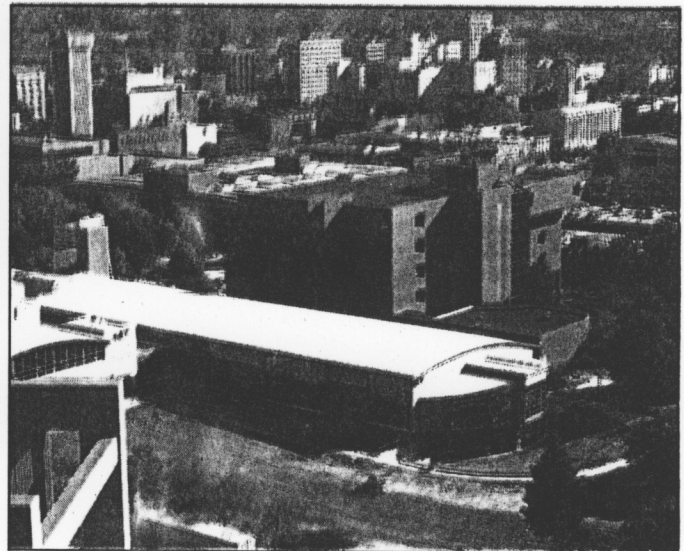


## YSU REC CENTER



These Jambor photographs of the area off of Fifth Avenue where the Andrews Recreation and Wellness Center is located were taken from the roof of Stambaugh Stadium. The picture on the left is from last spring, before construction, and the photo on the right was taken Wednesday afternoon.

# Rec center to open Monday

By: Eric Grosso  
FEATURES REPORTER

This Sunday will mark the official dedication for the Andrews Student Recreation and Wellness Center, a brand new facility that will offer nonstop exercise and recreation throughout the day.

A meditation room, a jogging track and a 53-foot tall rock-climbing wall are some of the center's unique features, in addition to the weights, cardio machines and basketball courts.

The 67,000 square-foot, \$12.1 million facility will open Monday to students and faculty, ending a long

journey that brought the center from being a rudimentary idea to the spotlight of YSU.

Throughout the early 1990s, several student initiatives passed in an attempt to create a recreation center. Fitness facilities had to be shared with athletes, shutting out students at certain times. Physical education classes also limited student access, but most importantly, the equipment and facilities were old:

**It's going to be one of the shining stars on campus.**

— Jack Kinyne

Beeghly Center was built in 1972 and Stambaugh Stadium in 1982.

Even with staff members and administrators recognizing the need for a fitness facility, the plans stood dormant for nearly a decade.

Facing decreasing state funds, a student vote was held to ask if they would pay for construction of the center. In 2000, 86 percent of students voted in support of a temporary tuition hike of \$75

per semester for the center. Even with students offering up the money, officials decided against the idea, as students were already contending with rising tuition. Over the next year, plans for the center took a back seat to looming budget concerns.

YSU President David Sweet then began talks with others one-on-one about the rec center, saying he and other administrators were in the "quietly fundraising phase" of obtaining money for the center.

The beginning of 2002 marked the start of the official campaign to pay

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for construction. YSU hoped to raise the \$12.1 million with nothing more than donations.

With fundraising covering the building costs, the debate began over who would cover the operation costs of the center. Generally, students were supportive of paying around \$40 per semester on top of their tuition, but with a recently passed hike of 8.9 percent, students were mostly against the idea of paying the fees combined with the tuition increase.

In the end, students were assessed the fee to pay for operation which started this semester.

The John S. and Doris M. Andrews Trust, John and Denise York and the Ward and Florence Simon Beecher Foundations each gave donations of over \$1 million. YSU alumni also donated around \$7 million to the university during this time, with officials taking \$5.4 million of that money and directing it to the campaign, leaving only \$1.1 million for scholarships and \$500,000 for university operations. The move made some question the priorities of top YSU officials, but the donations continued.

In March 2004, university employees and Board of Trustees members donated to the fund, falling just \$1 million short of the \$12.1 million goal. University employees contributed more than \$70,000. President Sweet personally donated \$10,000 with Board of Trustees member H.S. Wang giving \$100,000.

YSU also received a grant of \$600,000 from the Kresge Foundation in 2003 for the center. Officials broke

ground on the project on April 19, 2004, with Hively Construction beginning the project.

The fundraising goal was finally reached in June 2004 with more than 650 individuals donating. The private donations made YSU the only public university in Ohio with a rec center not constructed with public money since 1967. The project was given an Aug. 15, 2005 completion date.

Although students were happy with the construction's start, some weren't as excited about the logistics of the build. A main complaint was the fence surrounding the area, which cut off walkways. Students were surprised to find their favorite paths had been blocked, making some students late for class the first days of construction. The construction also moved the Spring Street parking lot from in front of Beeghly Center to the M-24 lot, taking away a section of student parking.

Another heated debate started when YSU Trustees gave \$4.2 million in university funds to the project in 2004. Trustees stated numerous times that the center would be built with private donations. The money was put up to cover future donations that weren't in on time for construction, but some wondered what would happen if the donations never came through.

Construction was halted, along with activities in Kilcawley Center, because of a bomb threat on May 3, 2005. After an early morning phone threat and a subsequent police search of the area, workers returned after a few hours.

In June, the ribbon cutting

ceremony was pushed back to Sept. 25 due to spring and summer showers which slowed work. With the date approaching fast, there's no looking back for YSU, the students, staff and administrators. Taking over a decade to complete, the center will open on Monday, ending a long and treacherous road to recreation and fitness.

Jack Rigney, director of campus recreation and intramural sports, called the center a major addition to YSU.

"It's going to be one of the shining stars on campus," Rigney said. "It's going to open the door to many students who are considering attending YSU. It will help attract students to YSU's campus as well as retain them. There's also a lot of employment opportunity at the rec center."

"It's a phenomenal addition to campus. It really is," Rigney added.

The construction of the rec center was complimented this summer by renovations totaling \$7 million. The most notable was a 4,000 square-foot addition to the YSU Bookstore. DeBartalo Hall received upgrades in 13 classrooms, including new ceilings, floors, lecterns, desks, chairs and paint. Numerous buildings on campus received new doors and the Beeghly Center pool was drained and re-painted. A number of parking lots also received upgrades.

The Andrews Student Recreation and Wellness center is just one of many similar facilities being built across the country. Many universities, including YSU, are hoping the buildings will entice new students when deciding on a school.

Boise State University recently finished a \$50 million project, which included

large plasma screens, a lazy river, whirlpool, sauna, cardio equipment with individual DVD players and a 42-foot rock-climbing wall.

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is in the midst of a \$77 million project to overhaul its two main facilities, and Southeast Missouri State University plans to break ground on a \$7.8 million project in January: students there requested a 25-person whirlpool and a deck for parties. Illinois College and Monmouth College in Illinois each recently built their own \$22 million fitness centers. Missouri Baptist University is beginning an \$8 million fundraising campaign similar to YSU's, with Missouri Southern State University in Joplin and St. Louis University both in the early stages of planning rec centers.

Lori Lynn, director of campus life at Southeast Missouri State, said, "Part of the reason college rec centers have become so super-sized is because the field of community rec is getting so posh."

The building boom is a response, in part, to outdated buildings that have become crowded with health-conscious students. Often an important stop on the campus tour, the centers also are about recruiting students.

The boom in recreation centers has been under way

since the early 1990s, according to the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association. The college trade group's 725 member institutions have 1,546 rec centers, nearly half built since 1995, including 25 percent built since 2000.

Whatever the reason for the center, students are glad it's finally done.

"A lot of the old buildings just couldn't provide anything worthwhile," said YSU student Jamie Wilkens. "Either they didn't have what you need or they were closed when you wanted to use them. The center is cheaper than most health clubs, so it works out pretty good for all of us."

Wilkens also noted that she plans on using the center a few times a week, the same as many of her friends.

Other students aren't so optimistic about the center.

"Honestly, it seems like a great idea right now, but what about in a few years," YSU student Rueben Shaw said. He wonders what will happen after the novelty of the center wears off.

"Will anyone still use it? I hope that people do, but you never know," Shaw said.

The rec center will open to students at 6:30 a.m. on Monday and will stay open Monday through Friday until 10:30 p.m. It will also be open from 12 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday.

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