

YSU breaks ground on \$12.1 million student rec center

It's the first privately-funded rec center at a public university in Ohio

Live web cam view of construction site

After more than a decade of student-led initiatives, fund-raising and planning, Youngstown State University broke ground today for construction of the \$12.1 million **Andrews Student Recreation and Wellness Center**.

The 65,000-square-foot facility – the size of nearly two football fields – will be the first recreation center at a public university in Ohio built entirely with private funds.

The center, which will feature, a fitness center, climbing wall, racquetball courts and a jogging track, will be open by the start of fall semester 2005.

"It's tremendous for the campus," said Chris Hritz, 20, of Austintown, a YSU sophomore who serves on a student committee that has been advising the university about the rec center.

"It's tremendous for the students. It will be a definite draw for the university. It's going to be exceptional."

The groundbreaking marks the high point in a journey that dates to the early 1990s, when YSU students first discussed the creation of a campus rec center. In May 2000, the student body voted overwhelmingly in favor of the center and later brought the idea to YSU President David C. Sweet.

"Once we got the ball rolling, Dr. Sweet picked it up and ran with it," said Ralph Morrone, a 2001 YSU graduate who, as a student, was one of the leaders to get the rec center initiative off the ground.

In January 2002, Sweet kicked off a campaign to raise private funds for construction of the facility, rather than pay for the project by increasing student fees.

"It was important to the Board of Trustees and me that we move forward with the construction of this facility without increasing the financial burden of students," Sweet said.

The John S. and Doris M. Andrews Trust, named after the late Youngstown financier and his wife, made the first major donation of \$2 million. Other major gifts followed: \$1.5 million from John and Denise York, \$1 million from the Ward and Florence Simon Beecher Foundation, \$750,000 from Anthony and Mary Lariccia and \$500,000 from D.D. and Velma Davis.

About 530 individuals, including graduates, faculty, staff and other YSU supporters, have made donations to the campaign, ranging from \$2 to \$2 million.

Among the donors are former YSU head football coach and current Ohio State University head football coach Jim Tressel and his wife, Ellen, and Carmen Policy, president and chief executive of the Cleveland Browns, and his wife, Gail.

In December 2003, the Kresge Foundation – a prestigious private foundation that provides money to nonprofit institutions worldwide - awarded a \$600,000 challenge grant to the project.

The campaign has now raised \$11.47 million and is expected to reach its goal by June 30.

"The success of this campaign – in the midst of an economic downturn – is a tribute to the dedicated supporters of YSU," said Paul McFadden, chief development officer. "It's a wonderful vote of confidence for YSU and for the role it plays in the community now and in the future."

The fund-raising effort was led by a 12-member cabinet co-chaired by Douglas McKay, president and chair of United Community Financial Corp., and Gregory Ridler, former chair of Sky Bank/Mahoning Valley Region.

The two-level rec center, designed by the Youngstown architectural firm of Hanahan Strollo, will be attached to the west end of YSU's Kilcawley Center and stretch almost to Fifth Avenue. The west end of the jogging track will be visible to motorists on Fifth Avenue. The general contractor for the project is Hively Construction of Canfield.

The center is part of a larger development project on the west side of campus that also includes a \$1.6 million expansion and enhancement of the YSU bookstore, which also is expected to be finished by the first day of fall classes in August 2005. The project is expected to particularly improve the visibility of the bookstore.

The rec center and bookstore improvements, along with the opening of the \$22 million, 408-student University Courtyard Apartments in August 2003, creates a major corridor through the university from Smoky Hollow on the east side of campus to Fifth Avenue on the west side, Sweet said.

"This is going to be a focal point of the campus," said Matt Pavone, a former YSU student who also led the charge to get the rec center project underway.

Morrone, who now works at CJL Engineering in Youngstown, said: "Not too many times in life does anybody get the chance to start something like this and, through hard work and dedication, actually see it come to fruition. It's definitely a point of pride for me and will make YSU a better place."