

Alfred University to expand fitness center, create new space for educational programs

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ALFRED, NY A renovation project slated to begin this winter at Alfred University's McLane Center will expand the University's fitness center while also increasing hands-on learning opportunities for students enrolled in the Athletic Training and Health Fitness Management programs.

Gifts from Alfred University Board of Trustee member Charlie Joyce and Sherry Walton (Alfred University '80, '88 MS), and Mena '73 and Rick Hansinger '75, will help fund a remodel of the current squash/racquetball courts at McLane Center, boosting the University's efforts to attract and retain students.

The work will be done in two phases, beginning in December at the conclusion of the fall semester, and will involve converting the squash/racquetball courts into a two-level facility. The lower level, which represents an expansion of the existing Gibbs Fitness Center, will house a 1,270-square-foot cardio space with state-of-the-art fitness machines. The upper level will be home to a 615-square-foot full-scale rehabilitation center and a 624-square-foot classroom for the Athletic Training and Health Fitness Management academic programs.

"The expansion of the Gibbs Fitness Center is part of a concerted effort by Alfred University to improve its health and wellness facilities, which benefit both the campus and local communities," said Alfred University President Mark Zupan, noting that the fitness center currently averages more than 20,000 visits per year. "Alfred University's Fitness Center will rival that of any of our peer institutions in size and scope, enhancing our student recruiting and retention efforts."

The project also includes a new 1,200-square-foot varsity weight room in the Gibbs Fitness Center, which will serve the University's more than 400 student-athletes. The varsity weight room will have 12 Olympic platforms to accommodate free weights and strength and conditioning equipment, along with a 450-square-foot artificial turf-covered space to be used for functional training exercises such as sled-pushing and tire-flipping. The varsity weight room is also set for completion by the end of next summer.

"Over the course of my five years here at Alfred University I am extremely proud of our efforts to create more opportunities for our entire campus community in the areas of fitness, health and wellness," Director of Athletics Paul Vecchio said. "The expansion of our fitness center footprint will further these opportunities for everyone in our AU community to live healthier lives while enjoying state-of-the-art amenities."

Jessica Hurlbut, assistant athletic director and head athletic trainer, pointed to the benefits the project will provide both academically and to the intercollegiate athletics programs.

"It will be an immense help for all student-athletes with regard to additional rehabilitation features," Hurlbut said. Students in the Athletic Training and Health Fitness Management programs "will also be able to utilize new technologies they have not been acquainted with in the past. The facility will provide a great area for growth in the education program as well as future recruitment of both students and student-athletes."

The project will be done in two phases to allow the fitness center to remain open during the spring 2018 semester. The second phase will be completed by the end of next summer, with the new facility available for use in time for the 2018-19 academic year. In addition to the renovations to the squash/racquetball courts, new free weights and functional equipment will be purchased for the fitness center.

Dave Preston, strength and conditioning coordinator in the athletics department, lauded the benefits of the project. "To be able to give (student-athletes) a space large enough where they can come in as a team and use cutting-edge, state-of-the-art equipment will allow them to tap into unlimited potential," Preston said.

Added Russ Phillips, head men's basketball coach: "The new fitness center and varsity weight room will be a game changer for Alfred University athletics. The design and setup is state-of-the-art and will rival any Division III facility."

The fitness center expansion project is but the latest in a series over nearly a decade that has improved intercollegiate athletic facilities and health and wellness opportunities benefiting the entire Alfred University and local communities.

In 2009, Peter '67 and Maris Cuneo funded an expansion at the Bromley-Daggett Equestrian Center at Maris Cuneo Equine Park. The following year, Yunevich Stadium's artificial turf surface was replaced with FieldTurf and a new grandstand and pressbox were added. Two years later, Alfred University alumni Greg '92 and Jeni Connors '94 funded the Connors Family Pavilion, a gathering place in the south end of the stadium. Harrington Field was unveiled in 2013, giving the Saxons' softball team a home on campus, and a year later, in the spring of 2014, the Joyce and Walton Family Center for Health and Wellness opened. The Joyce and Walton Center provided the campus and Alfred community a 33,000-square-foot facility, containing all-purpose courts, an indoor track, locker rooms and a multi-purpose room. In the fall of 2014, a gift from Galanis family funded renovations the McLane Center gymnasium.

"The level of support that our alumni have shown in improving our facilities, and indeed our entire athletic department, over the past decade has been nothing short of sensational," Vecchio stated. "I am beyond grateful to our alumni for their support as well as the leadership and vision of Kathy Woughter (vice president of student affairs) and President Mark Zupan in supporting these efforts."