



BIG Name. Frame. Expectations.

At 12 words and three symbols, the Student Recreation and Wellness Center/Athletic Field House/Indoor Varsity Golf Practice Facility has the longest name for a campus structure.

At 295,000 square feet, it's easily the largest of the nine new buildings constructed as part of the New Landscape for Learning campus enhancement program.

And as buildings go, it has a pretty ambitious to-do list. Administrators say they expect the Recreation Center and Field House to:

- help admissions attract and “wow” potential students and their parents;
- lure a generation raised on PlayStation and GameBoys off its couches and into shorts and sweatpants;
- help sway top high school athletes into signing with Akron teams;
- offers faculty and staff additional opportunities to exercise;
- offer real-world job experience to students in several majors; and
- work with a variety of student services to offer innovative screening programs.

Many who toured the facility while it was under construction say it will deliver the goods and more. One of the structure's biggest fans sits in the corner office in Buchtel Hall.

“This Student Recreation and Wellness Center is a magnificent facility, the best in Ohio,” says University President Dr. Luis Proenza. “The new center is a place for

people to be healthy, to enjoy themselves as they exercise, or even just to stop in and get a soft drink – or better yet, a health food drink.”

No Blue Rectangle

The structure's most obvious assets are its physical attributes. It dazzles visitors with a jaw-dropping list of amenities, surprising innovations, and proportions almost Tolkien in scale. And that's even before its scheduled opening this summer.

For example, consider the “recreation pool.” A big, blue rectangle, right? Wrong. This glassed-in mini-resort includes a 30-person spa; a winding, lazy river with current; a bubble bench; a vortex pool; a haystack fountain; two swim lanes; a ramp and a chair lift for wheelchairs; and a “wet classroom” where students, still dripping from the pool, can walk in and take their seats.

Not enough? There's a large framed area on the wall above the pool. Construction workers joked that the design element could serve as a movie screen, says Brian Lewis, the University's director of recreation and wellness services and the man in charge of the center. “That got us thinking,” he says.

That kind of out-of-the-blue-rectangle thinking permeates the facility's design and planned usage. From oversized lockers designed to accommodate students' backpacks, to online security throughout the building, the recreation center is packed

with touches that leave visitors murmuring, “that's a good idea.”

The facility's designer, Moody/Nolan Architects of Columbus, eschewed the traditional layer-cake approach of multiple floors, to create open lobbies that sweep from the bottom floor to the ceiling two stories above. The result is an airy, open feeling, as well as a constant reminder of the size of the structure. Other elements add to this perception.

The Wall

At 56 feet, the center's rock-climbing wall is one of the tallest on a university campus, says Lewis. Fissured and textured to simulate a real cliff face, it offers color-coded hand/fooholds so climbers can choose from varying degrees of difficulty. Of course, when you stand at the base, crane your neck up and realize that the top juts out over you, it's hard to believe that any path is classified as “easy.”

For Spiderman wannabes, a nearby 15-foot arched rock formation offers practice in upside-down travel. Floor-to-ceiling windows in the rock-climbing area provide natural sunlight for those inside, and entertainment for passers-by on Carroll Street.

But to really experience the facilities' dimensions, you need to visit the field house. At 155,500 square feet, the field house is the larger portion of the complex, and is connected to the recreation center by a ramp. Its cavernous main section houses a 100-yard varsity football practice

field with artificial turf and a 60-foot vertical clearance. The field is circled by a six-lane, 300-meter varsity indoor track suitable for NCAA indoor track/field events, and has seating for approximately 1,500.

Give Them What They Want

Size and sizzle will draw visitors, but to keep steady customers you need solid programming and innovative ideas, says Lewis. He should know. In 1993, Lewis received a Master of Science in Education degree from UA with a focus on exercise physiology/adult fitness. He most recently worked at Akron General Hospital's Health and Wellness Centers Association, which won 16 national awards for programming and facility, Lewis says.

"Our main target is the 85 percent of people who don't have experiences with fitness classes or intramural sports. We want them to come in and not make it look like a gym class, but something they can have fun with," he says.

The center will provide part-time and work-study employment to several hundred students, beginning in the fall. Lewis and his colleagues also want to offer students the chance to gain career experience in fields ranging from exercise science and physical education to information systems and communications.

That Division I Vibe

While the recreation center ministers to the general student population, the field house will give many UA athletes the kind of Division I facility they've long needed. In addition to the football field and running track, the facility also includes a sports medicine center, men's and women's varsity locker rooms, a varsity strength and conditioning center, and athletic equipment storage areas. The turf area has a netting system that can section off the field, and even isolate the entire gridiron from the running track.

The field house will benefit all UA varsity athletes, says Paul Hammond, assistant athletic director for facilities and operations. Baseball, soccer and basketball players will use the turf area, as well as athletes from track and field. Two teams, however, are particularly anxious for it to open.

The field house makes a huge difference for football players, who currently drive seven miles to the Rubber Bowl to practice.

But not anymore.

Akron's Field House is one of only two in the Midwest with an indoor varsity golf facility. Student golfers will have a putting green, bunker, video player development simulator, office space and study lounge.

The facility will not be limited to varsity athletes. Some intramural competitions and tournaments will be played on the turf, and Hammond is enthusiastic about

renting the facility out for events like high school track meets.

"It's not just about the education anymore," Lewis says, "Students attend universities not only for the academics, but also... the student unions, the recreational opportunities... they're looking for something they can connect with."

This new facility delivers that, in spades. ■

After Eastern Civ, a Dip In the Spa!

The New Rec Center/Field House Brings a Little "Club Ed" to Campus



Student Recreation and Wellness Center

- Three-court, hardwood gymnasium
- Two-court, rubberized floor gymnasium
- Elevated, 1/10th mile running/walking track with rubberized floor
- 56' climbing wall
- 15' arched rock formation
- 30' rappelling area with instructor's stand
- Cardiovascular training area
- Strength training area, with machines and free weights
- Two aerobics/dance studios
- Student lounge
- Juice bar with snack service
- Technology-equipped classroom for CPR training
- Outdoor equipment rental
- Organizational room for clubs and intramural sports
- Babysitting facilities
- Recreation pool
- Health and Wellness Center

- Entry desk using card scans and turnstiles
- Administrative offices
- Online security
- Locker rooms, including family changing areas and wet and dry entrances

Athletic Field House

- 100-yard football field with Astroplay surface
- netting to divide and isolate the turf area
- batting tunnels
- six-lane, 300-meter track
- varsity golf indoor facility
- 1,500 spectator seating
- sports medicine center
- strength and condition center
- men's and women's lockers and showers
- separate entrance for athletes to indoor fields
- athletic equipment storage