

Fitness Center Priority

RENDERINGS: TMP Architecture

The Kalamazoo College Fitness and Wellness Center is one of the most important priorities of The Campaign for Kalamazoo College. Simply put, it is an indispensable element of an education that addresses the fullness of human experience, according to President Eileen B. Wilson-Oyelaran.



Main entrance

“Right now there’s not enough space for students to engage in the fitness and physical activities they consider an essential part of a residential liberal arts college education,” said Assistant Director of Student Involvement Kate Yancho. Yancho teaches dance in the College’s physical education department and serves as advisor to one of the largest and most popular student organizations, the Frelon Dance Company.

“From the perspective of educating the whole person,” Yancho added, “the fitness and wellness center is a critical piece of the puzzle, and the need is urgent.” Yancho was a member of the Fitness and Wellness Center Planning Committee. That group’s duties included visits to such centers at residential liberal arts colleges that directly compete with K.

“Prospective students and their parents judge and make conclusions about the entirety

of an educational offering based on the perceived excellence of individual elements,” said Dean of Admission Eric Staab. “These elements include the state of being of campus buildings or even a single campus building.

“The majority of students we try to attract to K will not participate in intercollegiate athletics but nevertheless are strongly interested in fitness and physical activities,” he added. “Prospective students and their parents consider such activities part of a liberal arts experience. And opportunities for them are an expectation.”

A currently under-met expectation, according to Yancho. On track with its strategic plan, K has grown to more than 1,450 students, and those students are forming new organizations—many focused on fitness and performing arts. That excites Yancho because, in the *K-Plan*, student organizations serve as laboratories for the development of leadership skills. What alarms her is the absence of space for such growth.

Her alarm morphs to enthusiasm when she thinks about the proposed fitness center’s design. “There will be four large multipurpose rooms flexible enough to meet the needs of student organizations we might not even imagine now.” She loves the design of the building’s entryway. “Students, faculty, and staff have long decried the lack of an appealing gateway to campus,” she said. “With the two story windows opening up inside to outside and vice versa, one of the first things visitors will see is the vibrancy of K.”

“Those first impressions are huge,” said Staab. “They can symbolize the vitality of all aspects of what we do at K.” Staab also noted the fitness center’s vital effect on the retention of enrolled students. “Once a student is here we want that student to stay here, and a healthy happy experience is indispensable for that. That’s another reason the Office of Admission is so excited about this project.”

Sited adjacent to the Markin racquet complex, the two-story center will house a weight and cardio fitness area of sufficient capacity to meet the needs of all students and employees. It also includes racquetball courts, expanded locker rooms (for general use and for the K tennis teams), offices for the men’s and women’s tennis coaches, space for a tennis hall of champions, a seminar/meeting room, expanded storage areas, and an office and assessment room for the campus wellness director.

Yancho is particularly excited about the building’s dance studio, which will have a proper floor and the right

“The trustees of the Charles J. Strosacker Foundation recognize that in order to help students and employees reach their full potential, Kalamazoo College must promote a healthy work-life balance among all members of the campus community.”

Bobbie Arnold, President and CEO,
Charles J. Strosacker Foundation



stress of comprehensive exams will meet up with English majors playing racquetball,” said Yancho. “And all of them may get a chance to talk with an economics professor participating in a wellness program. And she may share a conversation with a Cirque du K alumnus working with current

Cirque du K students. And all this could happen in the vestibule’s food area, which is one of my favorite design features of the building.”

But it doesn’t have to happen there; the center will be the kind of space where everyone can connect with everyone else. Associate Vice President of Facilities Management Paul Manstrom, who consulted with the planning committee, said that his favorite design feature is the flood of light and openness one will experience as soon as one enters the building. “There will be an immediate visual connection with activities ongoing in all the areas,” he said. “In that sense, it will be much like entering today’s Hicks Center.”

“A close-knit community always has been central to K’s history, and this building continues that tradition,” said Vice President of Advancement Al DeSimone. It also continues the College’s tradition of fiscal responsibility. “With a square-foot cost estimate of approximately \$212, the building is frugal and efficient,” he added. According to DeSimone, a handful of donors have contributed a little more than half of the building’s \$7-million projected cost. “That’s good momentum,” he said, on

a project the entire cost of which will “be raised through philanthropy. We do not anticipate borrowing any funds to build the fitness center.”

Executive Director of Development Teresa Newmarch noted that the center’s design reflects the College’s commitment to sustainability. The Markin site is an efficient use of the existing campus footprint, and no green space will be lost, Newmarch said. And compliance with the College’s energy efficiency standard (part of its Sustainability and Climate Action Plan) makes it likely the building will use geothermal heating to maximize energy efficiency and minimize waste.

“The fitness and wellness center is an essential campaign priority,” President Eileen B. Wilson-Oyelaran emphasized. “I hope that many people use this opportunity to support The Campaign for Kalamazoo College.

“The new center will be a resource for all members of the K community. Today’s students and their parents expect the residential, liberal arts college experience to offer (and balance) a student’s explorations in the life of the mind, body, and spirit. For that, the new fitness center is critical.” |

“The fitness and wellness center is an essential campaign priority.”

equipment, including music capability. It will be K’s first appropriately dedicated dance space, an activity that has involved thousands of its students over the years and continues to grow.

Sharing Yancho’s excitement is campus wellness director Ken Wood, who expects exponential benefits for the health and wellness programs he creates and administers for K employees. He too operates those programs without adequate space. “For example, our yoga and Pilates classes often meet in the library,” Wood said. “We’re always settling for spaces that are not designed for the purposes for which we’re using them.”

The wellness program was launched in 2007 to provide employees, retirees, and their families the motivation and means to lead healthier, happier, and more productive lives. The program’s stress on prevention fosters positive health outcomes. It enhances morale by investing in wellbeing, improves productivity, reduces absenteeism, and benefits retention and recruitment of current and new employees, respectively. “The new center will encourage more participation and will give wellness a more visible physical presence and build a campus culture of health that benefits everyone,” said Wood.

Wood and Yancho also agree that the new center will have a profound effect on strengthening community ties. “This is a facility for everyone,” said Wood.

“A biology major using the cardio area to offset the

Campaign Update

At the end of January 2014, gifts and commitments to The Campaign for Kalamazoo College totaled \$89.28 million. The impact of this campaign is being felt across campus. More than \$8 million has been raised for scholarships that will keep K accessible to talented students regardless of their economic backgrounds. The \$7.35 million committed for endowed faculty chairs will ensure that K students learn from excellent faculty scholars. Donors have contributed \$930,000 to support student research, including the Senior Individualized Project. More than \$4.5 million has been contributed for the new fitness and wellness center, which will promote healthy lifestyles and foster a closer campus community.

Please visit the campaign website, www.kzoo.edu/giving/campaign, for more information. There is a role for everyone in The Campaign for Kalamazoo College. |



Entry area from second floor.





Inside entrance to the proposed Kalamazoo College Fitness and Wellness Center.