



CONSTRUCTION AND PLANNING

by Chuck Carlson

Albion College's Dow Recreation and Wellness Center

The earth is moving and the anticipation is rising at Albion College's Dow Recreation and Wellness Center. Groundbreaking began in mid-August for the 18,000 square feet of impacted space (11,000 square feet in new space and another 7,000 in renovated space) to the facility that will be known as the Julie and Joe Serra Fitness Center at the Dow and that will expand fitness facilities for all students. It will also offer new opportunities for the Dow to be used as a multi-function venue. The addition is expected to be completed by May 2020.

Improving Athletic and Fitness Facilities

The \$3.2 million addition is part of a \$5 million gift from Joe Serra, '82, who played basketball at Albion and earned his degree in economics and management. The president of Fenton, Mich.-based Serra Automotive is also a former member of the Board of Trustees and a 2013 Distinguished Alumni Award recipient. It has long been his hope to help the school increase and improve its athletic and fitness facilities and this is that opportunity. "We're going to have workout space available for a campus community of 1,500-plus students," athletic director Matt Arend said.

A Place that is Warm and Welcoming

"So much learning and growing takes place outside of the traditional classroom setting," said Erik Braun, Albion's lead director of advancement and assistant athletic director. "With that in mind, it is important to Joe and Julie that this new fitness facility be the type of space that is warm and welcoming for all students, regardless of their athletic ability, to experience community around physical fitness. On campus, facilities like these are gathering spaces and are important in the recruitment of prospective students."

The new Dow will include the following:

- A new entrance with a renovated lobby that will also benefit theatre patrons at the Herrick Theatre.
- 5,000 square foot expansion for a weight room and cardio center.
- Creation of a multi-purpose room that can be used for fitness and dance classes as well as for theatre classes.
- Renovated locker rooms and restrooms as well as new gender neutral restrooms.
- A smoothie bar near the new entrance with seating for students to gather.
- New offices for some athletic administration staff.
- Significant natural light, large expanses of glass, traditional Albion collegiate exterior with a modern interior, modern finishes and inviting spaces.
- New flooring and air conditioning in the atrium.

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"This will completely change the way we look at our athletic facility," said Doug Laditka, associate vice president for facilities management & development. "This improvement will make the Dow a destination." Arend agrees.

A Place to Relax the Mind

"Once inside the facility we want students to feel welcomed and comfortable," he said. "We want to encourage them to not only work out physically, but also view the Dow as a location for studying, meeting up for class projects or having a nice place to relax the mind. We envision the soft seating around the smoothie

bar to be a destination location for students to both conduct class work and simply relax."

The addition will also provide a boost for the College's theatre department, which is also located in the Dow building and where the Herrick Theatre, site of College theatrical productions, is located.

"This is very exciting," said Zach Fischer, assistant professor and chair of the theatre department. "There's now a box office and gathering area for our patrons and when they come in the atrium, they'll know exactly where to go."

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Tracking Progress

Arend said he hopes the exterior will be complete by November and interior work to commence this winter. There are also plans for a beam signing ceremony on Homecoming weekend (Oct. 4-5) in which all students are welcome to add their names to the new project for posterity.

As well, progress on construction can be tracked thanks to a new webcam that will be installed and which will be available to view on a dedicated website that will be launched soon.

“It’s exciting and it will be nice to be able to develop something for all the students,” he said.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Chuck Carlson has been the director of communications and media relations at Albion since 2015. Prior to that, he spent more than 30 years as an editor, reporter and columnist for newspapers in Virginia, Maryland, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Nevada and Washington.

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