

A Vision 40 Years In Making: Work Starts On Athletic Center

College's \$22 million recreational facility could be finished by fall 2018

BY VALERIE GORDON

Amanda Bottone, 30, a former psychology major at Suffolk County Community College's eastern campus in Northampton, had to delay graduation two times during her three-year enrollment because her transcript was lacking six physical education credits.

"I had to take yoga during the spring semester, and I had to travel to Centereach—26 miles away—for bowling," the East Patchogue resident shared this week.

Ms. Bottone, who graduated from the college in 2009 and is now working on her master's degree in psychology at Phoenix University, was among 4,000 students attending the college's Northampton campus whose curriculum requires that they complete two gym classes in order to graduate, according to Suffolk Community College spokesman Drew Biondo. The problem was that those attending the Northampton campus, unlike their counterparts enrolled at the college's other two campuses, in Selden and Brentwood, must travel long distances in order to complete the core requirements.

That could all change starting next fall.

Nearly 40 years after plans

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were first discussed—and two years following a groundbreaking ceremony held there—work finally began earlier this month on the eastern campus's new \$22 million Health and Sports Facility. Steel framing for the 40,000-square-foot facility began going up on the south side of the campus last month and is now projected to be completed by fall

2018, Mr. Biondo said.

Work was originally scheduled to begin in September 2015 but was quickly halted due to a "delayed permitting process," Mr. Biondo said. Those delays are also being blamed by some for upping the projected cost of the work by \$4 million, which, in turn, further put the project behind schedule as officials scrambled to secure the additional money.

Both county and state officials voted earlier this year to allocate an additional \$2 million each to cover the additional costs.

Now that they have cleared those funding obstacles, college officials said their future students won't have to travel off the Northampton campus to complete most of their physical education requirements.

"The steel is going up now so that the inside work can get done during the colder winter months," Mr. Biondo said. "We've been lucky we've had good weather."

In the interim, however, college students can earn their mandatory physical education credits in the spring semester when gym classes can be held outside or continue traveling to either the Ammerman campus in Selden or the Grant campus in Brentwood. As has been the case, no buses are offered between campuses, so students must find their own transportation.

"You pick the eastern campus because it's convenient to where you live and work—and then to have to travel so far just for a gym class because they don't offer it at that campus is a real hassle," Ms. Bottone said. "Especially if the weather is bad and you have to leave really early to ensure you arrive safely. They should be accommodating students on each

campus at all times, not just certain seasons."

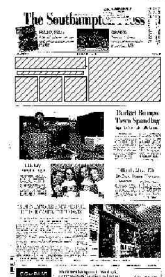
Once complete, the facility will offer indoor classes on volleyball, swimming, basketball and more. It will feature an eight-lane indoor swimming pool, basketball court, weight training room, rock climbing wall, locker room and shower facilities.

Mr. Biondo mentioned that similar to the Sports and Exhibition Complex on the Brentwood campus, the new eastern athletic complex will also allow for smaller shows, such as pet and wedding expos, and will be open to county residents for a minimal fee that has not yet been decided when the facility is not in use by the college.

The new facility will be constructed to meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards, according to Mr. Biondo, noting that, when finished, it should meet either the silver or gold standard for environmental efficiency, or just below the highest level of platinum.

"This project has been a long time in the making, and we're really excited about it," said Suffolk County Legislator Bridget Fleming, who was instrumental in helping secure additional county funds for the project. "On the South Fork of Long Island, the only indoor pool is at the YMCA in East Hampton. We have been working hard to move it forward, because it really is important to get it accomplished now."

Janet Mackay, camp director for Sports Pro Camps in Hauppauge, a summer program that is open to those between the ages of 3 and 15, has also showed interest in the fitness center now under construction. She currently uses the college's Brentwood facility for summer camps and said she would love to expand to



Eastern Long Island.

"It's incredible. I pinch myself every day that I get to do what I do," Ms. Mackay said. "The people at Suffolk have been absolutely beyond incredible in the support that they have provided, so when they told me that they were building a [fitness center] out east, I said, 'Done—we're in.' We're really excited."

Plans for the fitness center were first presented back in 1973, four years before the Northampton

campus was built, and were part of original plans for the complex, according to college officials. By the time the idea got off the ground, opponents blocked the fitness center's construction, citing a 1993 law that protects the core of the Central Pine Barrens from development. The campus falls within that environmentally sensitive area.

In 2010, Suffolk Community College officials finally received approval from the Central Pine

Barrens Joint Planning and Policy Commission to proceed, though another five years was required to obtain additional approvals. And, by that time, the price of the project had jumped another \$4 million, further delaying the work.

With those obstacles now cleared, Mr. Biondo said college officials remain optimistic and noted that construction "is moving very quickly."



Construction workers review plans for the new fitness center at Suffolk County Community College's Northampton campus.

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The steel framing is already in place for the new athletic complex at Suffolk County Community College's Northampton campus. Below, an artist's rendering of what the facility will look like when complete.

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