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After years of planning and now months of construction, the new fitness and wellness center is nearing completion. The walls are just about up, the windows are in and soon you will not be able to see in to the building. Come next fall, crowded gyms and cramped spaces will be a thing of the past as Radford University will have a new home for campus recreation and its various branches.

Currently, RU has two fitness facilities in Peters Hall and Muse Hall, with 4855 sq. ft. and 3600 sq. ft. respectively. For the almost 10,000 students that attend RU, that is insufficient space for the many people that want to work out. During most hours of the day, Peters and Muse, along with the single basketball court and detached weight room in Muse, stay packed with people anxiously

trying to find a machine.

The Peters fitness center was built in 2003 to give students another fitness option instead of the Dedmon center. When it was decided that the Dedmon center would be closed to the students and be used just for student athletes, things were set in motion to start preparing for the Muse fitness center in July of 2008, giving students a second option from the constant crowds in Peters. Closing Dedmon also took away the basketball courts that intramurals, club teams and any students could use. Jason Pace, who graduated from RU and is now the Recreation Supervisor for the Peters and Muse centers, used to play down at Dedmon before they decided to close it.

"I played intramurals all four years down there. There were three side courts we played on and then the championship was on the main court," Pace said. "We could go down there just during free, open hours and play on the main court all we wanted."

This new facility will be able to offer those three courts again like Dedmon once did, but also much more. Students only have to wait a couple more months for the new center as the "safe date" for the grand opening is set for sometime in Nov. 2014. Waiting a few months will seem like no time considering RU students have been in need of a facility like this for six years now.

Despite all the weather the construction crew has had to deal with, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs/Student Activities Ken Bonk is optimistic about the progress on the building.

"Progress is going extremely well. Weather related issues set aside, the men and women were still out there working," Bonk said. "You can visually see how well we are progressing with the windows going in. I will not say we are ahead of schedule but I will not say we are behind schedule."

Bonk also said that even though some elements of the construction cannot be done in the type of weather that Radford has experienced this winter, the crew has continued to make progress by doing things like the duct work, putting metal stud walls up and situating the windows in their appropriate spots.

The Student Fitness/Wellness Center has certainly progressed much faster than the new science building, but that has a lot to do with the structure of the building and what they will be used for.

"When you look at the fitness and wellness center, it is just a big open space. Once you get the steel up they go a lot faster," Bonk said.

So whereas the gym is a big open space, the new science building certainly is not, with the many classrooms and labs that will be included. Another comparison to look at with these two is the cost. The Center for the Sciences is expected to cost \$49 million while the Student Fitness/Wellness Center is somewhere in the \$30-32 million range. The College of Business and Economics building, which has been in use for almost two years now, cost about \$35.5 million and the new College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences Building, that is planned to be open by 2016, is expected to cost \$52.8 million according to the RU website.

So far, the budget has not been approved yet for the new facility, meaning that a lot of decisions have yet to be made and are still up in the air. One of those things yet to be decided is the hours of the gym.

“At this point, what is proposed would be to try and mimic the hours of the Bonnie. So whatever our hours are at the Bonnie we are going to try and stick close to that,” Bonk said.

So if that were to be approved the hours would be: Sunday 10 a.m. to 12 a.m., Monday through Wednesday 7:30 a.m. to 12 a.m., Thursday through Friday 7:30 a.m. to 2 a.m. and Saturday 9 a.m. to 2 a.m. But as of right now that has not been approved and the hours are still yet to be determined.

If the hours do get extended more than what they are now though, Kim Aspelmeier, who is the Facility Manager of the Peters and Muse centers, hopes that people will come in at different times instead of what happens in the current gyms now.

“I still think we are going to have the crazy thing where everybody wants to work out between 3-6. So it’s going to be a mad house over there. But I think with consistent hours, no academic schedules to contend with, we will hopefully see more traffic during the day,” Aspelmeier said.

The hope is that with this new large space there will not be a problem with the afternoon rush or people having to wait for equipment.

“Hopefully enough equipment is in there and we can put it in every corner that we can find and the students will be able to have an opportunity to work out, and if there is a wait time it will be very short,” Bonk said. “Kind of like at a restaurant, you know when not to go. But we got the best equipment, we went with the best stuff out there that we could put in.”

According to Bonk, all the equipment in the facility will be brand new and top of the line with

almost all of the cardio machines equipped with large TV monitors. Possibly the most exciting part about this facility for students will be the amount of cardio, weights and other machines in the building, something that RU students have not been able to experience since Dedmon closed.

“We will have 28 treadmills alone, right now we only have 12 total,” Aspelmeier said.

“The cardio area in the new place will be as big as Muse and Peters and the free weight area is as big as Peters.”

That does not even begin to list all the other pieces of cardio and various equipment that will be included once the building is completed. Free weights alone will take up a large majority of the first floor along with RU Outdoors, a multipurpose gym and classrooms, one of which will consist of a kitchen so that students can be taught “how to make ramen healthy” as Aspelmeier put it jokingly. Moving to the second floor is where the main entrance from campus will be. The second floor will also contain all the offices for various administrators, a three-court gym, racquetball courts and a few treadmills. Moving up to the third floor, or Mezzanine 1 as it will be called, is where students will be able to find the majority of the cardio and be able to enter the two-story track as well as have access to pin system weight machines. (An interesting feature about the cardio will be that it faces outward, meaning that students will be able to look out over Jefferson Street, the basketball and racquetball courts and campus.) Then finally the fourth floor, or Mezzanine 2, will consist of the track that starts on Mezzanine 1 and then goes back down, along with a stretching area.

“This gym is set apart because we picked and chose the best from every other place and listened to what works and what doesn’t work and we are now putting that in this facility,” Bonk said. “I think it will stand out due to that, with the amount of windows that will be in it and being able to look out and the openness of it will just be very attractive to everyone.”

In order to pick and choose from other fitness facilities to see what worked best, Bonk and other members of the committee who have been planning the facility toured various nearby colleges. The members of that committee consisted of: Dr. Norleen Pomerantz-Vice President of Student Affairs at the time, three student committee members, Roy Saville, Director of Facilities and Planning and Dr. Kathleen Poole, Health and Human Performance.

“We went and reviewed other fitness and wellness centers, not older ones but newer ones at the time. Old Dominion, Longwood, William and Mary put on a new addition, Appalachian State, JMU

is building a huge addition to theirs," Bonk said. "So we kind of took that all in to consideration, we had three students apart of the committee that helped us survey the current students (what do you like, what don't you like)."

The committee also decided on the location of the new gym and Bonk said it had a lot to do with the expected synergy between the Bonnie and this new building.

"We were looking at a lot of co-programming at that point. This was one of the spots that we looked at, we kind of picked and chose and said what's going to work, what isn't going to work and this was the spot it ended up being," Bonk said.

As for the fitness facilities the students have now, Peters will turn into a classroom/ lab area for Health and Human Performance but the Muse fitness center (not the weight room) will remain open as a satellite site. This will allow residents at Muse to still have that convenience of having a gym just a few flight of stairs away but Bonk also hopes that they will be venture over to the new facility occasionally to stay involved. Bonk said that at this point it is likely that Muse will keep its same hours and any newer equipment will be moved over from Peters.

Another thing Bonk hopes will happen is more opportunities for Health and Human Performance students to get some vital experience before leaving Radford. If things go as planned those students could possibly do an internship at the fitness center, where they would work with students who may need a workout plan made for them or help eating right and teach them how to lead a healthy lifestyle.

It is a big hope that from this new fitness and wellness center, Radford students will feel more inclined to lead healthy lifestyles and get more involved with the many activities this facility will offer.

"Its going to be a very, very active place. Our intention is to have something where students can go in and make their own workout tailored to them to help them lead healthier lifestyles," Bonk said. "All this space is the students' space and to have a dedicated staff in a facility that we schedule is going to be great because it will be pushing us as a professional staff to offer more and more and keep assessing. It will energize the students, it will."

The signs advertising the new building have certainly made it clear that it is the students space and Bonk reiterated that by stating that for the first year, faculty/ staff members will not be

allowed to use the facility. Once the administrators can assess the usage patterns and determine how they can make it even better for the students, the decision about faculty members will be revisited.

To compliment the new student fitness and wellness center will be seven acres of lit turf intramural fields. Those fields will take the place of where the Burlington building is now and are expected to be completed around the same time as the fitness center, November 2014.

“We are really pushing for fitness, wellness and recreation activity to really energize this campus because it already does. But to have dedicated facilities for this will really help us to establish more programs and increase the size of the different offerings,” Bonk said. “It’s really going to explode and when this opens we want to start with a bang. If I get this energized talking about it I can’t imagine what the students are going to be like when they get to use it!”

Students have certainly been talking and for different reasons too. Junior Robert Jordan for instance is thrilled by the idea of racquetball courts as Radford University currently has no place for him to play.

“I usually go to the Radford Rec center instead of the center here for the courts. Unfortunately it does cost money so I am very excited about the installation of the racquetball courts at the new center,” Jordan said.

Junior Yosef Bruer is another student who is very excited by the prospect of the new facility. Bruer said he works out anywhere from 4-7 times a week, depending on how stressful school is.

“I’m ecstatic about the new gym. Not only will it be bigger, but also there will be brand new equipment and hopefully will attract more students around the campus to come workout,” Bruer said.

Bruer said that while he does not have a problem with the facilities or how crowded they are now, he knows other people do.

“I’m very patient and there is usually no wait for the most part during the time I go. I only go to Muse and New River Fitness though. Patience and waiting is a part of gym etiquette, so everyone should keep that in mind,” Bruer said. “A lot of students seem to always be complaining about not having enough room or equipment. I’ll agree with those statements, but it has not stopped me from going, nor do I feel it has affected my workouts. I’ll still be happy though when that new

facility is finished.

Andrew Frazier is a senior at Radford and is in his second year working at the Peters fitness center. Frazier was apart of a group of students who got to meet, talk and have lunch with the three candidates who would be the Director of the new student fitness and wellness center.

“The window was open for us to ask a variety of questions like what sets you apart from the other candidates and what kind of ideas do you have that will benefit the center and make it successful,” Frazier said. The senior said he works out all the time and is pretty bummed that he is missing out on the new gym facility.

“I think this new facility is going to motivate a lot of people to come and its definitely going to be a state of the art facility. It’s going to be really awesome and I think when you look at the other facilities in the state, Radford will definitely rival them. Its just disappointing that I wont get to use it,” Frazier said.

As for the worker situation with the new facility, that is also still a decision that has to be made. The facility will obviously need more student workers to help with the daily operations but it has not been determined exactly how many that will be.

“We’re changing the whole training program this fall and that’s just going to be what we do for Peters before the new facility opens. I’m guessing there will be 60 workers in the new place and then probably 20 in Muse,” Aspelmeier said.

Pace, who does the hiring and such of the facilities, also said that he probably gets a new application to work at the current fitness centers everyday so it will certainly be competitive and new hires will be based on schedule’s and when he needs someone to work. There is also a job fair in the planning for the fall to try and fill some of those positions.

As construction continues to progress on the new building, soon people will not be able to see inside or through the building which is when Bonk and Aspelmeier feel that this facility will seem like a reality instead of just a structure. While there is still much to be done, the excitement about the new facility continues to grow not only with students but administrators as well. And when the grand opening finally arrives anything and everything inside will be brand new.