



Students gather at Albion College to watch the video of Joe Serra, a 1982 grad, and his wife Julie announcing their \$5 million gift for the new fitness center.

SPORTS AND FITNESS

by Chuck Carlson

Major Gift to Improve Fitness Experience at Albion

Joe and Julie Serra have given a leadership gift to launch a fundraising initiative to make two dreams a reality at Albion College.

The first is a newly expanded fitness and student activity facility at the site of the current Dow Recreation and Wellness Center. The second is a new or renovated competition facility for the teams that currently call Kresge Gymnasium home.

Making Dreams a Reality

Two longtime supporters of Albion College are driving a new fundraising initiative to make a pair of dreams a reality on campus.

For Joe Serra, '82, Albion was a "magical" place where he learned and developed the skills that would make him a successful Michigan businessman, as well as the friendships that would last a lifetime.

Expanding Student Health and Fitness Opportunities

Now he sees a moment to provide a little magic of his own for Albion, and in the process fulfill his—and the College's—desire to expand student health and fitness opportunities.

A \$5 million gift from Joe and his wife, Julie, will create a new fitness and activity space for all students and also renovate and, possibly, help build a new competitive site for athletic teams currently competing at Kresge Gymnasium.

The current target for fitness-space groundbreaking is fall 2019.

“We’ve been really fortunate and blessed beyond our dreams,” said Serra about the gift, which comes from his foundation and will be made in \$1 million increments over five years.

He described this commitment as “passionate for both of us, because it affects all the students. And I’m hoping it will help draw future students to consider and be a part of Albion.”

Expanding Dow Recreation and Wellness Center

The gift will focus on a major expansion of Albion College’s facilities at the Dow Recreation and Wellness Center in order to attract students to a state-of-the-art complex, an idea Serra has had for years.

The gift will add 10,000 square feet in all and feature a vast new fitness area with a full range of exercise equipment, an additional multipurpose exercise room, new locker rooms (including a gender-neutral locker room) and more.

Julie Serra, a Michigan State University graduate who visited Albion often while she

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and Joe were dating, believes every student on campus has something with which they can connect.

She described the future fitness facility as “a place for all students. They can say, ‘There is another part of this college that’s welcoming to me.’”

According to Athletic Director Matt Arend, the gift has identified a long-standing need.

“This gift from Joe and Julie Serra will positively impact all students on campus,” he said. “The expansion of the Dow will allow us

to provide opportunities to meet the fitness and wellness needs of all students and faculty, and it also paves the way toward a Kresge expansion and renovation for our men’s basketball, women’s basketball, and women’s volleyball teams that shows our commitment to being competitive in the Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Association. State-of-the-art campus wellness and athletic facilities have proven to be key components in the recruitment and admission process for both students and student-athletes.”

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“We need to make certain that we think of not only the mind, but we think of the body, we think of the spirit because students live all aspects of their lives on our campus...by building a community, by eating together, by practicing together, by running together, by lifting together. And so much of that can occur in an exercise facility.” — Albion College President Mauri Ditzler

To those ends, Serra hopes this gift will inspire more alumni to make their own gifts in support of the dual goals behind this endeavor.

“We benefited from Albion; let others benefit,” he said. “And let’s make sure we keep Albion as strong as it was when we were there. A re-engagement, a reconnection is what I’m hoping we get out of this. It’s the right time.”

Joe Serra is president of Serra Automotive, which began with a single automobile dealership in Grand Blanc in 1973 under Joe’s father, Albert. Today it ranks as one of the top 10 privately held retail automotive groups in the country and has 42 dealerships in seven states.

Serra attended Albion, in part, to play basketball for head coach Mike Turner, and was co-captain of the 1981 Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Association championship team. He played three seasons for the Britons and earned his degree in economics and management. A former member of the Board of Trustees, Serra received the Distinguished Alumni Award in 2013.

A Magical Place

Albion College President Mauri Ditzler believes the gift will benefit all students.

“We need to make certain that we think of not only the mind, but we think of the body, we think of the spirit,” he said, “because students live all aspects of their lives on our campus...by building a community, by eating together, by practicing together, by running together, by lifting together. And so much of that can occur in an exercise facility.”

“Albion is wonderful, it’s a magical place -- once you’re here,” Serra said. “But you’ve got to get here. So anything we can do to help attract and promote and make Albion look better to those students is going to be a win for everyone.”



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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