

MORE
THAN
EQUIPMENT



BY CRAIG PEARSON

Soon after commencement, the expanded William and Mary Student Recreation Center opened to widespread anticipation. Returning students immediately noticed the drastic increase in floor space, equipment, and services. Visitors said they could feel the open atmosphere created by glass-walled exercise areas which allow fluid visibility into the lower floors and adjacent courts. The enhanced lobby welcomes customers with easily accessible staff offices, an entrance gate accessible with a security pass, a large reception desk, a juice bar, and hanging pyramidal light fixtures that seem reminiscent of a grand hotel.



While the facility's users today express a range of reactions, most favor the expansion. Even with no basis of comparison with the pre-expansion facility, first-year students seem impressed. Zaker Rana, who plays basketball and exercises in the weight room, visits the center because "it provides a lot to do."

Although he wants additional free weights, first-year Jacob Nisbet enjoys the rock-climbing wall, racquetball courts, treadmills, and bikes, and he plays on the indoor soccer team. Junior Ed Bauman, who participates in intramural sports, likes the glass walls and large exterior windows, though senior Jessica Sitnik observes that exercising near the windows at night lets people watch her from outside while she only sees herself. Senior Brittany Bird, who visited during the construction to use ellipticals and free weights, thinks the renovations provide an

impressive environment when compared with the hot interim facility.

Karen Anslinger, a third-year law student, who has maintained a membership with the James City/Williamsburg Community Center, says that the new rec center provides more equipment, so she plans to let the other membership expire. Jeff Nelson, assistant professor of physics, plays intramural floor hockey with his children and pickup softball with graduate students. He says he plans to use the exercise equipment, a change from the past when "it always took a long time to get a machine" he wanted.

Accolades come from students as well as professional staff. Senior Elizabeth Wright and junior Larissa Wilburn, both of whom are student facilities supervisors, explain that the increased service quality causes patrons to enjoy their workouts more. Both receive many positive comments. Wright loves answering

questions because they allow her to describe everything the new building offers. Linda Knight, director of recreational sports, explains that movement of the staff offices from the basement provides “good morale and better customer service.” The additional staff hired after the expansion also helps with that.

The expanded area allows an increase in both equipment and recreational space. Cardio and weight-equipment sections now account for an additional 7,000 square feet. The new facilities include a climbing wall which can accommodate nine people on various routes. A multiactivity court, complete with team benches and goal areas, contains striping for indoor soccer, floor hockey, and volleyball, allowing students an area for more pickup games. Two group fitness rooms include dimmers, sound systems, and new equipment to provide various environments. Other rooms encompass outdoor activities, equipment

storage, and fitness assessment, as well as a multipurpose room. Fresh paint and refinished floors gleam in the pool, locker rooms, and Allen B. Miller Gymnasium, which contains striping for one badminton, two volleyball, and three basketball courts. The only reduction occurred in relation to the racquetball and squash courts; now there are three courts used for racquetball and one court for racquetball and squash.

Knight says she wants the center to exhibit an “open and welcome feeling,” hence the use of glass walls and computers that allow students access to e-mail. These new areas enable the facility to provide additional programs while increasing the quality of existing services. The center offers various classes and fitness incentive programs. Activities include club sports in addition to intramural teams and group functions. The renovation focused on creating a place where individuals can exercise and allows them “time to come

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and do whatever they need to escape their structured lives,” according to one staff member. A new massage therapist can also help for a fee of \$40. Requests for personal trainers, who—for an additional fee—provide fitness assessments, offer exercise plans, and monitor progress, have tripled since the center opened. Those wishing to direct their own programs can utilize almost sixty cardio machines or the brand-new weight and free-motion equipment. Students also can listen to one of fifteen televisions by plugging earphones into the bikes and treadmills.

The extent of the rec center’s offerings reaches beyond the campus. While it prioritizes students, faculty, and staff, the community also benefits. The Coast Guard’s Blue Dolphins group uses the pool to train, and local high schools hold swim meets there. A community crew team borrows equipment and practices on-site, and the center provides bathroom facilities and equipment for people participating in local races. Any community member can pay a registration fee to access the center’s programs and services.

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The renovation focused on creating a place where individuals can exercise and allows them “time to come and do whatever they need to escape their structured lives,” according to one staff member. A new massage therapist can also help for a fee of \$40. Requests for personal trainers, who—for an additional fee—provide fitness assessments, offer exercise plans, and monitor progress, have tripled since the center opened.

Originally constructed in 1989, the rec center has experienced its share of problems. When Knight arrived in 1999, she approached Sam Sadler, vice president for student affairs, about fully renovating and expanding the facility. One issue was that the building proved too small to meet the needs of the college community. Its size limited available exercise equipment; Knight notes that students “waited for over two hours to use cardio machines.” Floor hockey teams played outside due to poor indoor facilities; indoor soccer teams competed in an awkward space between two curtains in Miller gym; and the gym’s peaked ceiling interfered with volleyball games. Air conditioning—added in sections and limited by existing structures—inefficiently cooled the building, and leaks plagued the facility. For those reasons, as well as for others, Sadler supported Knight’s proposal.

Since students encompassed a majority of the rec center’s patrons, Knight included them in a focus group that planned everything, from color choices to services offered, during construction. She also had a recreational architectural consultant help design the new building. After the College created a debt service, a version of a 20-year loan, the fabrication contract went to bid in late summer of 2004. Although plans included only necessary changes, all bids arrived \$2.5 million over budget; however, the administration affirmed its dedication by increasing the debt service. Since the state provided no funding and no one offered donations, student fees will account for 85% of the payments to the debt service, with the rest coming from college staff and public-user fees.

The facility’s staff strived to provide normal services during renovation. The pool, locker rooms, and three gym courts

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remained open. Students accessed those areas plus cardio and weight equipment through holes knocked in the exterior walls. All programs were maintained, although schedules were modified, and classes often were held off site.

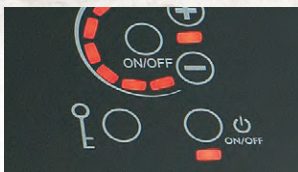
Returning patrons who had experienced the old and interim versions can easily see the improvements to the facility. The college community can feel proud of the facility as a place that provides students and staff an opportunity to enjoy themselves and remain fit in many ways.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Craig Pearson is a staff writer for William and Mary, a premier public research university widely recognized for its outstanding academic reputation, beautiful campus, and vibrant community. The university produces experienced, engaged, and successful graduates who lead lives of impact. Learn more at www.wm.edu.



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