

Ground broken on \$18M fitness center

Northampton facility to be completed by 2017

BY TIM GANNON

STAFF WRITER

An \$18 million, 48,000-square-foot health and wellness center — featuring an eight-lane indoor swimming pool, a rock climbing wall, a regulation-size basketball court, an indoor track and weight-training equipment — will be built on the Eastern Campus of Suffolk County Community College in Northampton.

And that equipment will be available to the public, according to college president Dr. Shaun McKay.

The college held a ceremonial ground-breaking on Monday for the new facility, which has been part of the college's master plan since 1973, four years before the Eastern Campus was completed, Dr. McKay said.

"This project kept getting pushed back and pushed back," said South Fork County Legislator Jay Schneiderman (I-Hampton Bays).

Mr. Schneiderman said the late presiding officer of the Legislature, Bill Lindsay, had placed him in charge of a county capital budget committee. When Mr. Lindsay was asked which projects he wanted to see move forward, Mr. Schneiderman recalled, he gave one answer: "Put the Suffolk Community College project back on track."

The project is now in the permitting process and should be completed 18 months after the permits are received, according to Drew Biondo, a spokesman for the college.

While there have been numerous efforts to bring an indoor swimming pool to the East End, including at least two in Riverhead, none has come to fruition, Mr. Schneiderman said.

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"There is nothing like this on the East End," he said.

All funding for the project is in place and a waiver was obtained from the Central Pine Barrens Joint Planning and Policy Commission in early 2013 to allow it to be built within the Pine Barrens core, where new development is largely prohibited.

Southampton Town Councilwoman Bridget Fleming said town residents will benefit from the health and wellness center, too.

"I've been on the board five years and not a week goes by that somebody

doesn't complain that we don't have an indoor pool," she said.

The center will include a 13,500-square-foot gymnasium that can accommodate a regulation-sized basketball court, as well as a three-lane running/walking track, according to officials.

It will also have a 2,200-square-foot area containing strength- and weight-training equipment and a floor-to-ceiling rock climbing wall. A large aerobics room will accommodate 18 stationary bikes or 28 yoga mats, as well as dance and exercise classes.

Also planned is a faculty office and work area, a nursing lab and a 30-station nursing classroom, according to officials.

The proposed eight-lane swimming and diving pool would be on the eastern part of the building and would have seating for 150 people.

"We're going to transform lives in Suffolk County and on the East End," Dr. McKay said.

He said Suffolk Community College students on the East End should have the same experience as those at the Brentwood and Selden campuses.

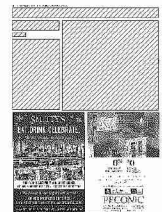
The lack of a gym makes it difficult for students at the Eastern Campus to get necessary physical education credits, he said.

Once built, the health and wellness center will be made available for both public and college use, much in the same way the facility at the Brentwood campus is, Dr. McKay said in an interview.

In Brentwood, people can pay an annual fee to be able to use the gym or the pool and can also book events there, he said.

There are high schools that use the pool in Brentwood for competitive events and Dr. McKay said he's already getting calls from local schools seeking to use the pool planned for the Eastern Campus.

The Suffolk County Police Academy



is located at the Brentwood campus and police and emergency services personnel train at the facility there. The Navy has also used the Brentwood pool for training, he said.

The health and wellness center could also be used for competitions, Dr. McKay said, adding that the Brentwood facility is "constantly in use."

Public use would be limited to times when the college is not using the facility, he said.

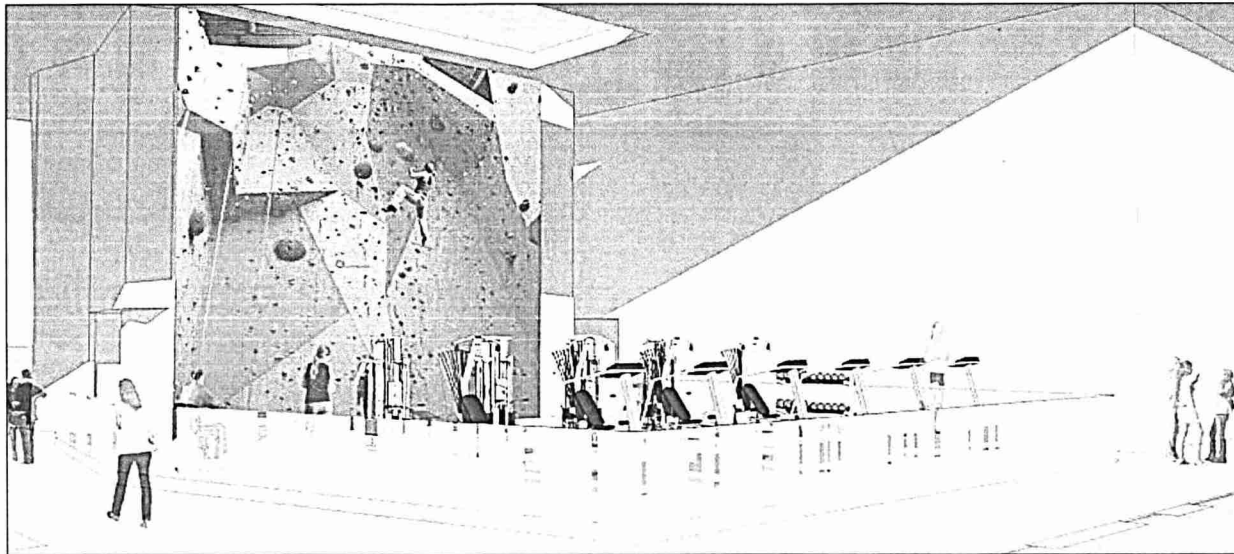
Suffolk County Legislator Tom Barraga (R-Islip) was a member of the college's board of trustees back in the early 1970s, when the Eastern Campus was first being planned.

He said it took vision to plan the Eastern Campus then and suggested that the county take the college a step further now, too.

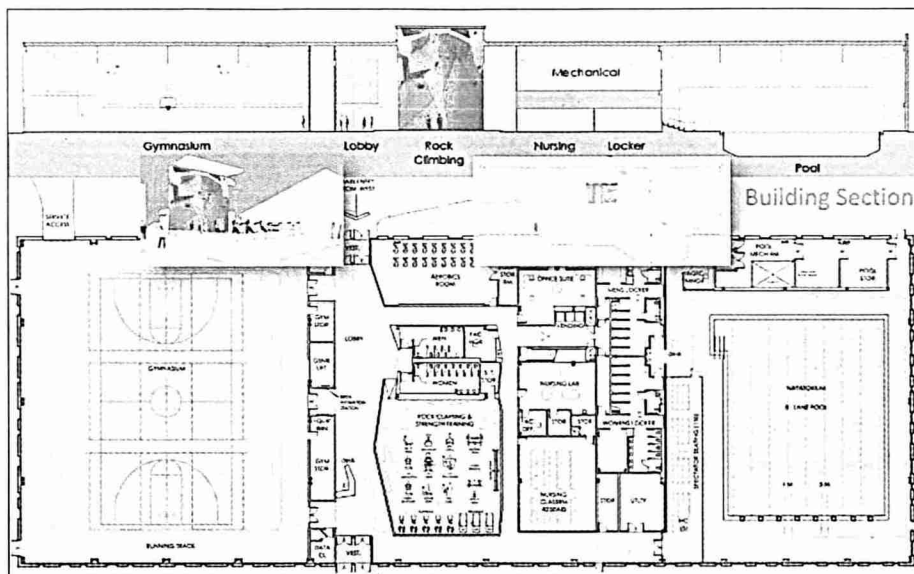
"It's time to form Suffolk County University," he said at Monday's ground-breaking. "It's time to become a four-year program."

Mr. Barraga said students who complete the two-year program at Suffolk often go out of state to complete their degrees. He feels that a four-year program, which would still be under the State University of New York system, would enable many of those students to stay on Long Island.

tgannon@timesreview.com



COURTESY RENDERING/DRAWING



Above: The entrance lobby to Suffolk County Community College's new health and wellness center will feature a rock-climbing wall. The entire 48,000-square-foot facility will be open to the public.

Left: A health and wellness center has been in the works at the college for over 40 years. The project is now in the permitting stage and should be completed 18 months after final permits are received.