LONG ISLAND BUSINESS NEWS

Date: Thursday, October 15, 2015
Location: COMMACK, NY
Circulation (DMA): 5,095 (1)
Type (Frequency): Magazine (W)
Page: 41
Section: Main
Keyword: Suffolk County Community College

Center of Health

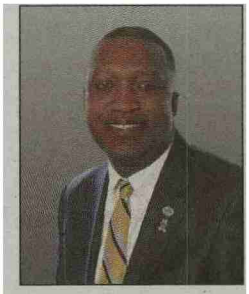
New athletic facility for East End to move forward after decades of delay

By KRISTEN D'ANDREA

After first being proposed in 1973, plans to build a nearly 49,000-square-foot health and wellness center on the Eastern campus of Suffolk County Community College in Northampton are finally moving forward.

The building will feature an eight-lane indoor swimming pool, regulation-size basketball court, indoor track, aerobic and weight-training room, locker room and shower facilities, classrooms, faculty space and nursing facilities.

"The Eastern campus does not have any true athletic space," said SCCC President Shaun McKay. "The new building will be available for community use and allow our Eastern campus to serve as a complete academic center for eastern Long Island."



SHAUN McKAY: The project will benefit the college and the community, while boosting the East End economy.

Last week, a groundbreaking ceremony was held for the project, which is now in the permitting process. Construction on the project, which will seek Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification, is expected to be complete 18 months after the permits are received, McKay said, noting a request for proposals for construction companies will be going out imminently.

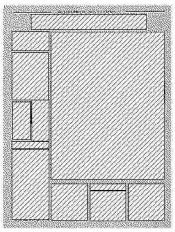
In addition to the delay this project faced for decades, there have been numerous unsuccessful efforts to bring an indoor swimming pool to the East End, specifically Riverhead, according to Suffolk County Legis. Jay Schneiderman, I-Hampton Bays.

"Because of the cost associated with this facility, the project suffered repeated delays," he said. "In recognizing the importance of this project, myself and others pushed hard to get the funding in place so we can now move forward."

About half of the $18 million in funding for the facility was secured by New York State Sen. Ken LaValle, R-Port Jefferson, and New York State Assemblyman Fred Thiele, I-D-WF-Sag Harbor, and county legislators secured the rest, according to Drew Biondo, college spokesman.

The campus, which currently comprises several academic buildings, an energy plant and a learning resource center, is nestled within the Pine Barrens. As such, when considering any development, "we are very mindful of the Pine Barrens, but the [Central Pine Barrens Joint Planning and Policy Commission] has blessed this project," McKay said. In fact, the college received a waiver from that group in early 2013 to allow the project to be built within the Pine Barrens core.

"Although the health and wellness center is part of Suffolk County Community College, it will be open to other community members, as well," Schneiderman said. "The facility will attract economic activity for downtown Riverhead and other surrounding communities such as Westhampton, Westhampton Beach, Quogue, East Quogue and Hampton Bays."



Currently, McKay said, the East End lacks a facility with the capacity to hold a major convention or event. For the last several years, SCCC has hosted a major

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international badminton tournament at the Health, Sports and Education Center field house on its Michael J. Grant campus in Brentwood. The new center on the Eastern campus will enable the college to house similar events and contribute to the economic development in the region, McKay said.

Another plus, McKay said, is that residents on the East End will be able to utilize the facility.

"Everyone will have access," he said.

McKay said he's already been contacted by a local swim team and schools looking to use the pool. The gymnasium and weight training facility will be available for public, as well as college, use. People will have the option of booking events onsite or paying an annual fee to use the gym or pool.

"State and local officials recognized the economic importance of building such a facility – to not only the college but to the East End of Long Island," McKay said. "In essence, we are fueling an engine of future growth for the college and the region."

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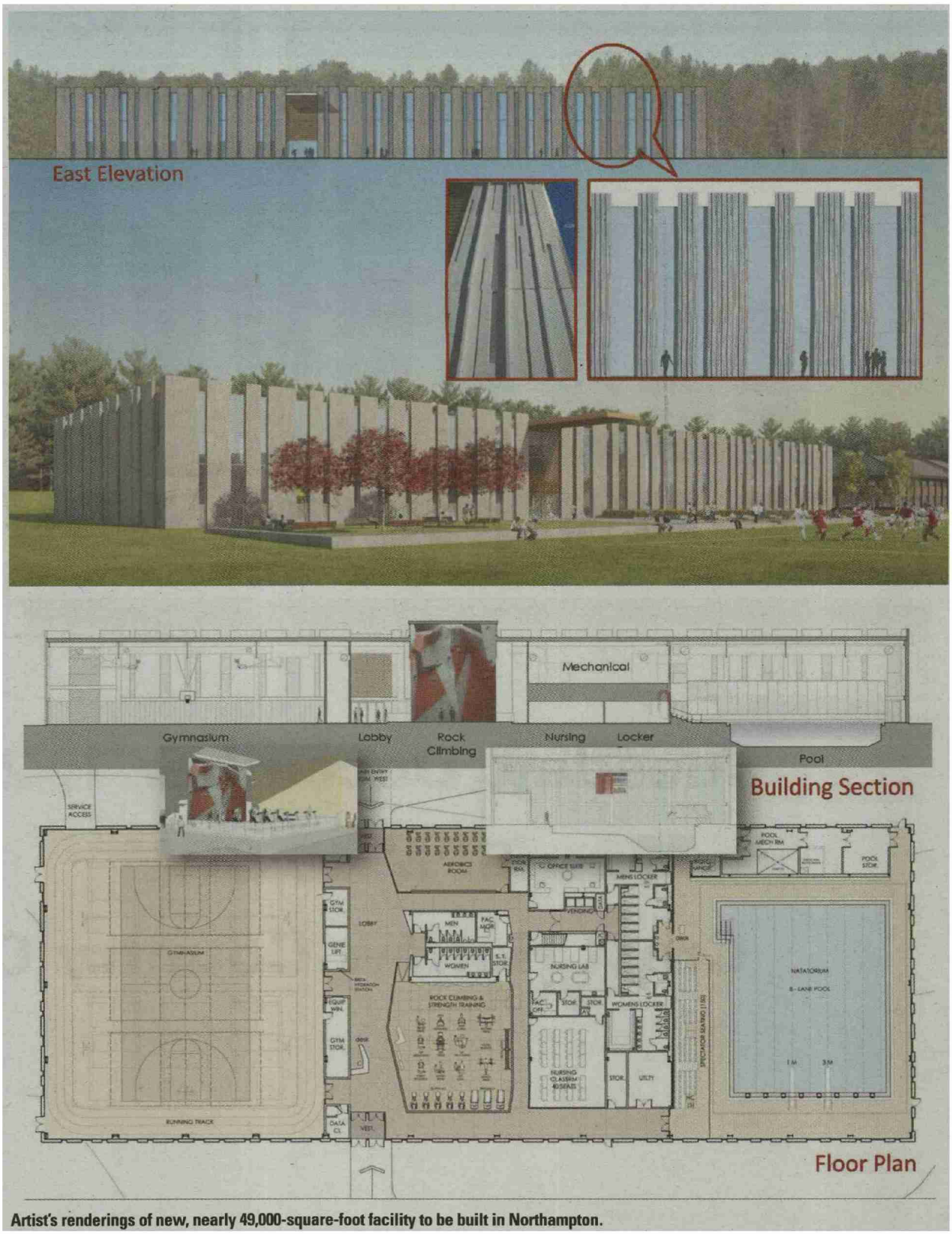

Artist's renderings of new, nearly 49,000-square-foot facility to be built in Northampton.

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