

Mustangs plan to open facility in 2017

Written by Jim Ecker

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Mount Mercy University plans to break ground on the new \$15 million Robert W. Plaster Athletic Complex this spring and have the massive outdoor facility ready for competition in the spring of 2017.

The university revealed final plans for the complex during a Holiday Open House at the University Center on campus Thursday evening. The Mustangs have raised \$12.5 million so far for the facility and are seeking an additional \$2.5 million in gifts to reach their goal, Mount Mercy President Laurie Hamen announced to a gathering of alumni, faculty, students, staff and friends.

The new facility will feature a baseball field, softball field and a stadium for soccer and track, among other features. The softball stadium has been named Busse Field in honor of a donation from the Busse Family.

Hamen said a final decision on whether to begin a varsity football program will be made early in 2016. If Mount Mercy adds football, the stadium can be modified to hold practices and games.

An animated video of the Plaster Complex was played during the Holiday Open House, showing an overhead view of all three lighted fields, a walking and bike trail, locker rooms, concession stand and parking lots.

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The campaign to build the new complex is called "Home Field Advantage," because the facility will give Mount Mercy teams a true home field instead of holding their practices and events at various facilities around Cedar Rapids. Mount Mercy's outdoor teams will finally have a home field advantage all their own, several speakers remarked.

Hamen and athletic director Paul Gavin noted the success that Mount Mercy teams have enjoyed without their own home and predicted even better days in the future. "I am so enthused with the success we are having at Mount Mercy and I am so enthused about our new athletic complex," said Hamen, a big sports fan who played ice hockey as a young girl in Minnesota.

Hamen appealed to Mount Mercy alumni and friends to help with the final \$2.5 million stage of fundraising and to help open doors in the community.

During his formal remarks, Gavin mentioned how legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden said he tried "to create a masterpiece" every day of his life. "Without a doubt," said Gavin, "this new athletic complex is a masterpiece."



Gavin played basketball and golf as a student-athlete at Mount Mercy in the 1980's before beginning a long and successful career as a coach at the school. When he enrolled more than 30 years ago, Mount Mercy did not have its own gym and played basketball games at then-Regis High School.

Gavin played in the first game at the Hennessey Recreation Center when the facility opened in 1985 and now 30 years later he said he's just excited about

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the Plaster Complex. "We're excited for our current students and just as importantly for our future students," he remarked.

A raised plaza will look down into the baseball and softball fields, making for a scenic view of the facility. All three of the fields -- baseball, softball and soccer -- will have artificial turf.

The facility will be built on land between 17th and 19th Streets NE near campus. Old abandoned buildings and materials have been removed from the site and the school is ready to begin construction in a few months.

Homan spoke about the "Jump Start" program that Mount Mercy will be offering with 35 neighborhood organizations and social service groups, allowing those organizations use of the facility at no charge. In addition, kids from those organizations will be able to attend Mount Mercy camps for free.

It was announced that Mount Mercy had a record enrollment this semester of 1,877 students.