

College Moving Forward With Events Center Plan

By Gene O. Morris

With more than \$8 million already committed, the McCook College Foundation has passed the 75 percent mark in its campaign to raise \$10 million to build a spacious new events center for McCook Community College.

"The campaign is moving closer to the goal," said Stephanie Gunter, Director of Administration for the McCook College Foundation. "With donations continuing to come in, we are anticipating the college board giving the go-ahead for construction in 2011."

When that happens, it will be a major accomplishment, not only for the McCook college campus, but for the community of McCook and the Mid-Plains Community College Area as well.

While the project inspired the single largest fund drive in the college and community's history, it is not surprising that support has been so substantial and widespread. The reason is that throughout the existence of the McCook college campus, it has been generously supported by area citizens and alumni. In fact, every structure on campus, dating back to the 1920s and 1930s, has been due, in part, to citizen support.

The McCook Community College Events Center will be a proud addition to that legacy. It will be a grand building, encompassing 53,000 square feet of space. The center will rise on the upper side of Kelley Park, across the street northwest from McMillen Hall and northeast from Weiland Field.

The location is the result of community cooperation, as the McCook City Council made the site possible by deeding the college 2.9 acres of parkland. The building itself has been in the planning stages for many years, because the True Hall gymnasium, built as a WPA project in 1939, has long been cramped, both in floor space and seating capacity.

Seeing the need for a new, modern structure, the Mid-Plains Area board and administration approached Nebraska's Coordinating Commission for Higher Education. The commission agreed with the need for the events center, giving its endorsement to pursue the project in July 2007.

At that point, the McCook College Foundation swung into action, leading the drive to raise the needed \$10 million for construction and operation.

Once completed, the events center will feature a full-sized gymnasium floor, an auxiliary practice gym and retractable seating for up to 2,000 spectators. The center will also include seven offices, a conference room, a catering area, a walk-around space, and training areas for aerobics, cardio-vascular health and weight training. There will also be a large lobby area and nearby parking for 210 vehicles.

The result of all this will be a spacious events center, poised to serve an expanding enrollment, as well as regional and statewide events such as district and regional basketball tournaments, conventions and trade conferences.

Back in 1926, McCook established itself as a leader by establishing Nebraska's first junior college. By raising funds to help the college area build the new events center, the tradition of leadership is going forward into the 21st Century.