Open for business on opening day

Opening day at the E. L. Wiegand Fitness Center in mid-February was exactly what one would expect when a student-centered building has been more than three years in the making.

Our students, excitedly and enthusiastically, took full advantage of the 108,000-square-foot facility. They bounded up the “fitness stairway,” a series of stairs leading from the first-floor entry all the way to the fourth floor, where an eighth-mile running track awaited them. Not far away was an open space, training space, packed with users who tested themselves with weight equipment. Upstairs were five multipurpose rooms for fitness classes such as yoga, Pilates, aerobics and Zumba, as well as a gymnasium for three multi-use courts and a cardio zone for stationary bikes and treadmills.

It felt like a lot of students were using the building. And they were. According to Campus Recreation and Wellness, more than 4,000 students flowed through the building on its first day of operation. Clearly, the building was meeting a need. It exemplified the University’s ongoing commitment to our students’ whole-person success. Health and wellness, numerous national studies have shown, are interwoven with the success of college students. And we firmly believe that by more fully integrating student wellness into our newest facility, we are helping our students lead healthier, longer and more productive careers and lives.

How the E. L. Wiegand Fitness Center came to be is also instructive. It illustrates how partnerships with donors, foundations and philanthropic organizations help our University realize key aspects of our core mission. We’ve been a university on the move for some time now. And it is no exaggeration to say that without the continued support of our donors, local foundations and the philanthropic organizations of our community, we could not offer the vast array of services, programming and support that our students need. In addition to student fees and University funds, the contributions of several individual donors, foundations and philanthropic organizations were the difference in making the E. L. Wiegand Fitness Center a reality.

Recently, not long after its opening day, I happened to walk by the E. L. Wiegand Fitness Center again. It was in the evening this time, and the structure’s large, wide windows were filled with light. Students were still using the treadmills. They were still bounding up the fitness stairs. If anything, the building, fully lit and fully in use on a midweek night, looked just as busy as its bustling opening day. It was a proud moment—for our University and for all those who chose to invest in our future.

Marc A. Johnson
President