

# UWF Celebrates Groundbreaking On University Park Center

By [DAVE DUNWOODY \(/PEOPLE/DAVE-DUNWOODY\)](#) • OCT 7, 2016

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*Officials from UWF and Florida St. break ground on UWF's new University Park Center.*

CREDIT DAVE DUNWOODY, WUWF PUBLIC MEDIA

Ground has been broken on the University of West Florida's latest construction project: a mixed-use facility adjacent to Pen Air Federal Credit Union Field.

When University Park Center opens in the spring of 2018, the \$6.8 million 32,700 sq. ft. building will house the new football program, along with providing space for the UWF College of Health, and the Florida State University's Regional Medical School Campus.

UWF President Judy Bense says partnering with Florida State through University Park is emblematic

of the twenty first century evolution of universities.

"I will tell you that universities do compete with each other," said UWF President Judy Bense. "But on the other hand universities are in the same kettle of hot water. We've got the same goals, the same problems, the same metrics, the same issues that we deal with."

FSU medical students have been completing clinical rotations in Pensacola since 2003. Gary Ostrander, Vice President for Research at FSU, announced plans for a new physician assistant program that, pending accreditation, will begin in August of next year.

“This program will require more space when the PA students rotate to the regional campuses for their clinical training,” said Ostrander. “And this new building will help us work with the University of West Florida to build a PA pipeline here in the Panhandle.”

Ermalynn Kiehl, Dean of the College of Health, says the new partnership will bring something very different to the Pensacola area.

“I believe [it] will not only serve our students well in learning how to work together as health care providers,” said Kiehl. “But also in elevating the graduates’ ability to assess and provide services to this community and the other communities that we serve.”

The health and medicine programs will occupy the second floor of the facility. The ground floor will contain a state-of-the-art weight room for all UWF student-athletes, as well as a football locker room, equipment room and laundry facilities. Athletics Director Dave Scott, UWF Class of 1988, looks at the project through the eyes of an alumnus.

“I take a lot of pride in that there’s all of a sudden the University of West Florida has become a commodity of value,” Scott said. “Not that it hasn’t always had great academic programs and a great school; it’s just that you’re starting to recognize that and see the perception in the community with a little more brand recognition.”

“This space and this building [are] really huge in our development as a program, and our development as we continue to grow,” said UWF football coach Pete Shinnick. “To be able to have a facility that we’ll be able to call our own; to be able to show in the recruiting process, will just continue to enhance what we’re trying to do here.”

Thursday’s groundbreaking begins phase two of development for University Park. Phase one was completed last February with the opening of the football field, which was named Pen Air Federal Credit Union Field last month.

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