

UWF breaks ground on \$6.8 million University Park Center

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The University of West Florida on Thursday broke ground on University Park Center, a new \$6.8 million, 32,700 square foot mixed-use building next to the school's planned football stadium.

The building is the latest addition to the school's "University Park" district, which is centered around UWF's as-yet-unbuilt Pen Air Federal Credit Union Field. University Park Center will house locker rooms for the football team, as well as a state-of-the-art weight room for all UWF student-athletes, an equipment room and laundry facilities. The building will also provide office space and meeting rooms for UWF's athletics department, as well as both the UWF College of Health and FSU College of Medicine.

"University Park Center will be a foundation upon which UWF can grow into the future," said UWF President Judy Bense. "Not only will it provide permanent facilities for our UWF football team, fostering ownership and enhancing future recruiting efforts, but it also creates a space for interprofessional collaboration in health education, research and practice between UWF and FSU. These are the types of projects that will make all the difference as we transform the University."



The \$6.8 million University Park Center will be located next to UWF's planned football stadium. (University of West Florida/Special to The Pulse)

UWF's long-awaited football program began its inaugural season in September. The team currently plays at the Community Maritime Park in downtown Pensacola, and the team's offices are currently housed in temporary facilities adjacent to the UWF Field House.

Pensacola-based Caldwell Associates Architects is overseeing the design for the project, while Childers Construction of Tallahassee is serving as the construction manager at risk. The building will be LEED-certified by the U.S. Green Building Council, officials said.

The groundbreaking on University Park Center marks the beginning of what officials call the “second phase” of University Park development. The first phase was completed in February 2016 and included 12 acres of site work, associated utility infrastructure, lighting and the construction of a synthetic turf field. In September, UWF announced a \$1 million gift to the school’s athletics programs by Pen Air Federal Credit Union, in exchange for which the field will bear the credit union’s name.



Conceptual plans for UWF's University Park district. (University of West Florida/Special to The Pulse)

The building's second floor space is being developed to provide a location for campus and community partners to access UWF College of Health leadership and a base for operations for the FSU College of Medicine's Pensacola Regional Campus for third and fourth-year medical students. The space will foster more integration across the two universities through the UWF/FSU Physician Assistant Partnership Program, officials said.

The UWF Center for Interprofessional Collaboration in Health Education, Research and Practice will be included in the College of Health suite on the second floor, featuring work space and a compilation of all projects and scholarly activities within the College. Multiple health disciplines will be represented in the administrative suite, including medicine, physician assistant, nursing, public health, medical laboratory sciences, health sciences and administration, psychology, athletic training, exercise science, community health education, fitness and conditioning, and physical therapy. The second floor will also include the College of Health dean's office.

FSU medical students have been completing clinical rotations in Pensacola since 2003. More than 200 of Northwest Florida's top physicians serve as faculty members in the College of Medicine's community-based teaching model. A number of UWF graduates have attended medical school at FSU, as the institution seeks to produce physicians who are responsive to community needs, especially through service to elder, rural, minority and underserved populations.

“Our medical students have benefited from the partnership we have with the Pensacola medical community, and many of them have returned to this community as practicing physicians,” said FSU President John Thrasher. “Taking this step to work with our friends at UWF is a great opportunity not only to share resources, but to expand our efforts to identify students in Northwest Florida who identify with our mission – not only in medical school, but in our developing new PA program, as well.”