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SCSU Now

NHEC breaks ground

Saturday, March 3, 2012

In a sentence, President Earl H. Potter III summed up the \$14.7 million construction project that will remake, by this fall, the 23-year-old hockey arena on the south edge of campus.

"The NHC is now the NHEC," he told a crowd of several hundred at the March 2 groundbreaking ceremony for St. Cloud State's National Hockey and Event Center (NHEC). [View the recorded UTVS webcast.](#)

But that name is temporary, Potter added.

University officials are having conversations with suitors about naming rights for the building, which will increase in size by one-third and become a regional events center. See floor plans and more at the [NHEC website](#).

Central to the construction project, which is slated to be substantially complete this fall, is a 50,000 square-foot, four-story glass atrium that will extend south from the current facade to Herb Brooks Way. In addition, 20,000 square-feet will be remodeled.

Chris Coborn, campaign chair, announced that his community-based committee will lead the fundraising effort for an additional \$12 million.

- [Read Coborn's "Revitalizing a Campus and Community Connection" letter \(PDF\)](#)
- [View the NHEC floor plans \(PDF\)](#)
- To make a gift, contact Kurt Stelten at (320) 308-2073

In all, university officials project more than \$30 million in enhancements to the NHEC, part of a commitment Potter made to redeveloping Fifth Avenue, the main north-south boulevard through campus.

The NHEC is a bookend to the City of St. Cloud's recently completed [River's Edge Convention Center](#). In between are a flurry of redevelopment efforts, including the Coborn Plaza complex completed in 2010. That's the vision put forth by Potter, Mayor Dave Kleis, a St. Cloud State alumnus, and Fifth Avenue Live strategist and developer Brian Schoenborn, also a St. Cloud State alumnus.

The four-story glass atrium will house a main floor lobby and ticketing area adjacent to the main rink. The ground level will include elevators and stairs to the arena's south concourse, as well as areas that recognize project donors and celebrate the men's and women's hockey programs, according to Steve Ludwig, vice president of administrative affairs.

The addition includes two loading docks and a large receiving area. These and other improvements will enable the facility to host concerts, theater productions, trade shows, speakers, conferences, meetings and other sporting events.

That event component will contribute to St. Cloud's growing identity as the key entertainment/convention destination between Fargo and Minneapolis-St. Paul, according to Potter. The expansion also helps maintain the competitiveness of the university's NCAA Division I hockey programs, especially the men's program, which joins the new, high-profile National Collegiate Hockey Conference in 2013.

The southeast corner of the building will feature a new entrance/ticketing area for the Community Rink. Patrons of what used to be called the Practice Rink will have access to a remodeled concession stand and two new restrooms, in addition to the existing restrooms.

The second floor of the addition will include a Husky Athletics team store, two new concessions stands and two new bathrooms. Current bathrooms and concession stands will be demolished to make the south concourse wider, improving foot-traffic flow at games and events.

The addition's third floor, which will not afford a view of the main rink, will include unfinished space for future coaching and arena management offices.

The fourth level will feature about 14 spectator suites with bathrooms and working space for support services. Most of the suites will seat 12 spectators. The suites will improve the acoustical characteristics of the main arena, enhancing sound quality for concerts and other events, said Ludwig.

Architects are JLG Architects, Fargo, and Hagemeyer Mack Architects, St. Cloud. Construction manager is Donlar Construction, Waite Park.



Holding ceremonial shovels at the March 2 NHEC groundbreaking are, from left: Mayor Dave Kleis, Athletic Director Morris Kurtz, President Earl H. Potter III and Chris Coborn. Coborn is CEO of Coborn's, Inc., and NHEC campaign chair.



From NHC to NHEC

Outgoing Athletic Director Morris Kurtz, who has served St. Cloud State for 28 years, brought a historical perspective to the March 2 NHEC groundbreaking ceremony. He recalled a conversation between hockey coach Herb Brooks and Brooks' mentor, John Mariucci, a legendary player and coach battling cancer.

"It irked John to no end that the state of Michigan had six Division I hockey teams and the state of Minnesota only had two. And, on his deathbed he asked Herb to help fulfill a life-long wish: Add another Division I hockey program in the state of Minnesota right here at St. Cloud State University."

Kurtz saluted the late President Brendan J. McDonald for helping start that hockey program with Brooks and working to get the Legislature to help fund the National Hockey Center. He added that current president, Earl H. Potter III, has displayed that same leadership in the last four years, pushing forward the expansion and remodeling of the hockey arena into a regional events facility.

For nearly a quarter century, the arena has been an economic engine for the university and Central Minnesota, Kurtz said.

"These enhancements will make it even more of an economic engine," he said. "The National Hockey Center is now the National Hockey and Event Center."

Kurtz retires in June.

St. Cloud State is located 70 miles northwest of Minneapolis-St. Paul along the banks of the Mississippi River. It offers 17,000 students more than 200 undergraduate and graduate programs and an Education for Life.

- Story and photos by Jeff Wood

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