

Dr. T.K. Gregg Community Center nears completion on Spartanburg's Northside

TUESDAY, MAY 5

New state-of-the-art facility to become community anchor for revitalized Northside neighborhood



The young boy was 6, maybe 7, in Assistant City Manager Mitch Kennedy's estimation. One of a number of children from the surrounding neighborhood who was getting a sneak peek at the new Dr. T.K. Gregg Community Center nearing completion on Howard Street, the child stared in wonder at the size of the swimming pool inside the structure.

The pool was built, but not yet filled with water, and the boy had a question for Kennedy.

"Is that really going to be a pool?" he asked.

"Yes, it sure is," Kennedy responded.

Then the boy looked out the large windows facing Howard Street, looked back at the pool, and then looked up at Kennedy.

"I live right there!" he said, pointing out the windows. "I'm going to live that close!"

"And that," Kennedy said, "is why we do what we do."

Some investments aren't so easily measured by a spreadsheet. They are the kind that include injecting hope and rebuilding trust among their aims. On that score, before it even opens, Kennedy found validation in that young child's excitement about the new center and its pair of indoor pools.

Within weeks, the final punch-list items should be completed and the T.K. Gregg Center will be ready to welcome its first visitors. But while the COVID-19 pandemic has temporarily scrambled the city's plans for a grand opening event, it has not interfered with the completion of the facility. The \$12 million community center is still on track and on budget, and will open to the public as soon as the city deems it safe from a health perspective to do so.

“We don’t have a date set, but we certainly would hope sometime in June we will be able to open this facility,” Kennedy said. “In the meantime, we will use this time to train our staff and finalize plans for the programming that will be available here. The silver lining is that we will be better prepared once we do open than we might have been otherwise.”

There is a lot to prepare for — and to be excited about. The center will be, in Kennedy’s words, “a new YMCA-quality” recreation and community center:

- The indoor aquatics area with its two pools will allow a multitude of uses as well as serve as the home of the Spartanburg High School swim teams. Spartanburg School District 7 paid for a number of upgrades and additions, including a state-of-the-art scoreboard and rollup doors on the west wall of the competition and lap swim pool. And a \$250,000 donation from Bank of America will be used in part to underwrite free swim lessons to any child residing in the city and/or School District 7.
- The basketball court includes a top-of-the-line, sparkling wood floor that is sure to instantly become a favorite of community ballers. With six baskets, the court can be utilized at any given time for a regulation full-court game, two shorter courts for pickup ball, or six practice/halfcourt areas. An elevated track is above the basketball court.
- A dedicated room on the second floor means Zumba, yoga and other group exercise classes won’t need to be held on the basketball court.
- The second floor also features a workout room that will include a number of state-of-the-art cardio machines as well as strength training equipment.
- Back on the first floor, a large community room anchors the front of the building. A smaller room that provides a direct entrance to the pool area will be available for birthday parties and other events and meetings. Locker rooms and showers are situated adjacent to the pool area as well.

During the final week of April, workers were completing the parking lot and landscaping outside the building as well as a number of minor items inside. Within a couple of weeks, exercise equipment and furniture will be moved in, a certificate of occupancy will be issued. In a different, pandemic-free time, the first swimming lessons, pickup basketball games, and Zumba classes could follow right then.

In due time, those activities — and much more — will begin. And that’s when the center will transform from a handsome new piece of construction into something much more. The amenities will attract people of all ages and from all walks of life. The sounds of their activities will provide the center with a daily drumbeat. The people themselves will provide it with a heartbeat.

“I am very proud of how our city doesn’t just look at investments in terms of the physical structures — we look at investments in people,” Kennedy said. “When you invest in people, you help create hope, you help create opportunity, you help create possibilities that didn’t exist before. I believe that is how you ultimately build a community where everyone can feel like they belong and where everyone has a chance to

succeed. And then they have the chance to give back and inspire the next generation. That's what this new center represents."

All of what Kennedy says comes into focus when a child, before the center even opens, exclaims: "I'm going to live that close!" In that simple exclamation, an elementary school student articulated the connection between public investments and their impact on people.

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This is the first part of a series the City of Spartanburg will provide in the coming weeks on various projects and programs the city is undertaking.