



The Star-Ledger

A shift in athletic field kicks off \$51M project at Livingston High

Sunday, September 09, 2007

BY CARMEN JURI
Star-Ledger Staff

Standing on the school's new field, Livingston High School Principal Pam McGroarty marvels at the sand and rubber mixture beneath her feet.

She recalls the grainy feel of dirt when she coached field hockey early in her career,

"I coached on this field when it was grass. I can remember the bumps and the rocks. The grass gets worn out," she said. "It was a nightmare."

In the 1980s, grass was replaced with AstroTurf, she recalls, but by then she was no longer coaching.

Today, artificial turf blankets the latest reincarnation of the field. The field's location has changed, too, exactly 30 yards to the east.

Moving the field is the first phase in a school construction project that will result in a state-of-the-art physical education building large enough to fit 1,800 students. The facility, being built where the field once stood, will include a fitness room, dance and wrestling room and storage space for equipment, McGroarty said.

In December 2005, Livingston voters passed a \$51 million referendum to provide additions, renovations and alterations at the high school, McGroarty said. The project is expected to add 95,000 square feet to the school and renovate 68,000 square feet. There will be a new science wing with 14 classrooms, according to the district.

McGroarty said the construction is crucial because the student population has increased by 39 percent, from 1,196 in the 1990-91 school year to 1,666 this year. By the 2008-09 school year, the number of students is expected to be 1,727, according to district figures.

The existing gym was unable to handle the growing student population, she said.

Livingston business administrator Steve Robinson said the track around the field is expected to be completed by next summer, hopefully sooner, depending on the weather and other factors that affect construction schedules.

Since the spring, runners have been bused to neighboring districts such as Millburn and West Orange.

Currently, a section of the track is being used as a staging area for the new science building, he said.

"Once the building is up, we don't need the area for prepping," he said.

The old gym will be converted into a digital imaging and TV studio, McGroarty said, in keeping with the growing demand from kids who want to explore TV production, robotics and digital imaging.

Growing demand for science and technology courses and labs have fueled the push for new facilities, she said. Antiquated classrooms and labs are not fulfilling the needs of a student population that generally takes more than the minimum required science courses.

"These kids need facilities to pursue their passions," she said. "We have young people who are going to be future leaders in that area," she said. "This isn't about thrills and frills."

The new field, named after the late football coach Allen "Jake" Jacobson, will also serve the Livingston community, said Livingston Athletic Director Pat Genova. Community groups, soccer clubs and charity fundraisers will all use the field.

"This is a place that will never sleep," McGroarty said.

Carmen Juri may be reached at cjuri@starledger.com or (973) 392-1853.

© 2007 The Star Ledger

© 2007 NJ.com All Rights Reserved.