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U. Alum Donates \$10m. for Gimbel Renovation

By Sharon Male
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Trustee David Pottruck's gift will allow for the gym's expansion, and the center will be named in his honor.

University Trustee and 1970 College graduate David Pottruck will donate a total of \$10 million for major renovations to Gimbel Gymnasium over the next two years, University President Judith Rodin announced yesterday.

Pottruck will also donate \$2 million to fund a state-of-the-art classroom in Huntsman Hall, the Wharton School's new facility to be built at 38th and Walnut streets. Pottruck received his MBA from Wharton in 1972.

Pottruck's donation will allow for renovations that will expand the current recreational facility into a larger health and fitness center that will reduce over-crowding at the gym. The new center, which officials estimate could cost a total of \$20 million, will bear Pottruck's name.

The Katz Fitness Center, the Gimbel Gymnasium and Sheer Pool will remain as they are within the larger center and will retain their names.

Officials have not yet developed an architectural plan or a timeline for completion, but Executive Vice President John Fry said the project was a "high priority summer project" and hopes to have plans ready by this fall.

Outside of Gimbel yesterday, Rodin expressed her delight with the donation and her gratitude to Pottruck, calling him "one of Penn's luminaries" and reasserting her commitment to improved recreational and athletic facilities at the University.

"Penn students appreciate the value of physical activity as a release from schoolwork and the foundation of a healthy life," Rodin said.

University officials first attempted to address the need for better exercise facilities in 1996 when they hired the Washington, D.C.-based consulting firm of Brailsford & Dunlavey to create a list of recommendations for the future development of athletic and recreational facilities on campus.

The report called for 225,000 additional square feet of indoor recreational space and suggested the demolition of either or both the Levy Tennis Pavilion and the Class of 1923 Ice Skating Rink to make room for an indoor running track and facilities for team sport practice.

University spokesperson Ken Wildes said that the renovations to Gimbel do not preclude the future building of such a fieldhouse.

As a result of the recommendations, Gimbel underwent \$1.2 million in renovations last summer for the construction of the ground-floor Katz Fitness Center that may have proved too successful. Though the popular fitness area now totals 7,500 square feet, more than 5,000 students, faculty and staff lined up this fall to register, resulting in overcrowding and waits to use many machines.

Pottruck's donation could allow the structure to expand to the edge of the nearby parking garage, potentially wiping out the fresh air food plaza located adjacent to the gym. As part of the renovations, the facility's facade will likely be changed -- making it more open to Walnut Street.

Pottruck, whose daughter is a Penn student, currently serves as president and co-chief executive officer of The Charles Schwab Corporation, based in San Francisco.

Though his company reported a net income of \$270 million last year, Pottruck says there was a time when he could barely afford to attend college. Because of his athletic ability -- he wrestled and played Quaker football -- and his "extreme financial need," Pottruck was the recipient of a scholarship that he says enabled him to come to Penn.

"When you've been the beneficiary of the generosity of others, you learn the importance of giving back to the community," Pottruck said.

And students said they are certainly appreciative of the gesture.

Undergraduate Assembly Chairperson Bill Conway, a Wharton junior, thanked Pottruck for his donation and expressed the belief that having a place to exercise will "keep students from doing other things like watching TV, [drinking] alcohol and [doing] drugs." The UA passed a resolution in January of last year asking the University to heed the recommendations outlined in the Brailsford report, calling for \$40 million renovations to Gimbel that would double the facility's size.

College senior Alana Nappi, who attended yesterday morning's announcement, said she was just happy the facility is finally going to be expanded.

"It's about time," Nappi said. "If they're trying to make us well-rounded students, I think fitness and physical well-being are just as important as an academic education."