



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville
P.O. 1600
Huntsville, AL 35807-4301

News Release



Number: 07-027
Date: July 23, 2007

Benning fitness center showcases design criteria

By Debra Valine

Staying fit to fight is the Army way. Soldiers and Family members at many installations exercise in older facilities that offer basic equipment and limited space, but few frills.

With the dedication of the Sgt. 1st Class Paul R. Smith Fitness Center June 29 at Fort Benning, Ga., Soldiers and Family members there now have a 100,000 square foot, state-of-the-art exercise facility.

The new \$19 million physical fitness facility is the result of a renewed push for what the Army Corps of Engineers calls Centers of Standardization. The U.S. Army Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville is the Center of Standardization for physical fitness centers.

The Smith Fitness Center is one of the first built using the physical fitness center criteria, and it's also the largest to date, according to architect Jay Clark, Engineering Directorate. Clark worked with Janet MacKinnon, the Fitness and Aquatics Program Manager for the U.S. Army Family Morale Welfare and Recreation Command, and other regional and installation sports and fitness experts to come up with the criteria. The team looked at what fitness facility functions already existed on the installation and what functions were needed. Flexibility was built into the design so installation commanders can adapt the new facilities to their requirements.



Public Affairs: 256.895.1693
Fax: 256.895.1689

Huntsville Center: *"Put Huntsville on Your Team!"*
Visit our website at www.hnd.usace.army.mil

“We found installations had too many basketball courts and not enough aerobic space,” Clark said. “We use standardized criteria rather than plans to get exactly what the installation needs, for instance, more weight rooms.”

Huntsville Center worked as a consultant on the design charrette for the project. Savannah District, Corps of Engineers, had the lead for construction. Savannah District awarded the construction contract to Turner Construction. Huntsville Center is now involved in buying the office furniture and furniture for the lobby and pool.

“Standardized information we get from Huntsville is always a help,” said Tim Morris, Savannah District Corps of Engineers’ senior project manager for Fort Benning. “It is a beautiful facility that came in ahead of schedule. The commanding general wanted the grand opening by July 4 and we held the ribbon cutting June 29. The fitness center is right across from the post headquarters so it gets a lot of visibility.”

“We presented the standard, answered questions and reviewed the final design,” Clark said. “We worked with Fort Benning officials to resolve any issues that surfaced during construction. For instance, the request for proposal did not specify the right type of aerobic flooring so they came to us and we worked that issue.”

Clark said the team learned they need to develop very detailed criteria and make sure the RFP reflects that. The aerobic flooring was one example; the climbing wall is another.

“They would have liked it to be taller,” Clark said. “There were pipes in the construction they weren’t aware of. We need to make sure all this is addressed in the criteria.”

Clark said planners also had to consider how to address anti-terrorism and force protection issues.

“To get the image that we want to have in these new facilities, but include some of the constraints we have in Army construction like force protection and energy conservation is very

challenging, especially on tight budgets,” Clark said. “The structure has special reinforcing and special frames. The glass must meet certain requirements, too.”

What we are trying to push is a design that is more like what you would see at a college or university or a community center – a state-of-the-art facility, Clark said.

“It is a great facility,” said Ken Wetherill, Fort Benning’s sports director. “Everybody did a great job on this. Overall the consensus has been positive. There are some personal preferences that people would have liked to see, but overall, lots of good feedback on the new facility.”

Amenities include:

- A 10,000 square foot, two-story weight room with a cardio theater.
- A cardio area in a balcony where you can be out of the way, but watch what is going on in the weight room below.
- A smaller balcony with cardio equipment that overlooks the lobby and the pools.
- A three-court gymnasium for basketball and volleyball.
- A natatorium that has a lap pool and a recreational pool as well as a hot tub.
- A large aerobic room that can be divided into two rooms.
- A women’s weight room where there is specially designed equipment and a spinning room.

“I think we’ve brought the fitness center designs to a modern level,” MacKinnon said. It is wonderful to see a fitness facility with an open air concept.

A similar, but larger, fitness center is being constructed at Fort Bliss, Texas. It will be built with the same criteria. Once complete, it will be the largest in the Army with approximately 120,125 square feet. There will be five basketball courts. Corps of Engineers’ Little Rock District is working with Fort Worth District on that project.

“Fitness is critical for Soldiers,” MacKinnon said. “FMWRC conducts three surveys (Sample Survey of Military Personnel; Survey of Army Families; Leisure Needs Survey) that address needs of Families and Soldiers. Every survey ranked fitness facilities as No. 1. It is becoming increasingly important to families. Within MWR, fitness facilities remain No. 1 in importance and actual use. It is wonderful when Soldiers enjoy using a facility for recreation which also helps them with mission readiness. They get two-for-one!

“The involvement of the local sports director and his staff is critical to the success of the project,” MacKinnon said. “Mr. Wetherill was instrumental in making this happen.”