

# Lavins Center opens on time; 'ET' shown

## G.P.P.'s new activities building a big hit

By Brad Lindberg  
Staff Writer

Mayor Palmer Heenan conducted opening ceremonies for Grosse Pointe Park's year-round activities building while standing beneath a basketball hoop in the facility's full-court gymnasium. But he didn't need a ball to score points. The

building was a slam dunk on its own.

"Awesome," said Pam Yates, blown away by a picture window view from the second-floor fitness center.

"Great," said Yates' friend, Diane George.

"I knew it was going to be a great accomplishment, but it's even bigger and better

than I imagined," said William Giovan, a judge in Wayne County Circuit Court. "I feel fortunate living close to this grand new building that has so many facilities."

"This is a happy day for me and a happy day for all of us," Heenan told a group of at least 200 residents attending ribbon cutting ceremonies last week at Windmill Pointe Park.

The ambitious project grew from a modest desire to revamp Windmill's aging bathhouse. Park administrators took the opportunity to create a venue for offering supervised family-oriented activities 12 months per year.

"This project is the brainchild of Dale Krajniak, our city manager, to give residents something special," Heenan said.

"We have a great city council to work with," Krajniak said. "They understood the circumstances of trying to get a project like this done expediently. With the caliber of talent surrounding this project, it was easy."

Ground breaking took

place eight months ago. The building opened on time for Memorial Day weekend.

Numerous Park residents helped pay for about one-third of the \$3.2 million building through donations to the Grosse Pointe Park Foundation.

Chief among donors were Dolores and Paul Lavins, for whom the center has been named.

"It's fantastic," said Dolores Lavins minutes after joining her husband, Paul; grandson Harrison, 6; and Heenan in the ribbon cutting.

"It's a beautiful facility," Paul Lavins said. "We wanted to leave something to the community so everybody could enjoy it."

Dr. Clark Okulski, Foundation president, called the center "Grosse Pointe Park's crown jewel, an edifice built for our children. This will truly be a family center."

Okulski's support of the project will be remembered by the center's movie theater being named in his honor.

Similarly, names of the center's other amenities recognize benefactors:

• John and Elizabeth Stevens Atrium,

• Ken and Deborah Meade Fitness Center and

• Pat and Patricia McKeever Recreation Lounge.

Heenan said substantial gifts were received by Robert and Nancy Denner, Joe Acheson, Ron Milner and Patricia Heftler.

The building's \$400,000 annual operating cost is expected to be paid through memberships to the fitness center and enrollment in numerous classes and programs.

The center's most talked about feature is the Okulski Theatre and Performing Arts Center.

Moments after opening ceremonies, Kaitlin Arnold and Defer Elementary School classmate Lauren Dansey, both 12, settled into the theater's padded, high-backed, lay-back chairs to watch "ET, the Extra Terrestrial." Some viewers ate popcorn.

Back in the fitness center, Anthony Swancoat, 15, a sophomore at Grosse Pointe South High School, surveyed 15 strength training machines, five treadmills, three stair step machines, two recumbent bicycles, two racks of dumbbells and a leg press machine.

"You can come down here with friends from the Park and lift weights, play basketball and watch movies," Swancoat said.

Heenan thanked architects Dale Ehresman and Mark Chamberlain for designing a "building with style and personality."

Heenan said construction was expedited by a "weapon of mass construction" — Andy Phlaum of Ferlito Construction.

Terry Solomon, head of the Park's recreation department, will oversee operations.

"I can't think of anyone who is more dependable or thoughtful for managing this building," Heenan said.

Heenan didn't overlook his late friend and colleague on the city council, Vernon Ausherman.

"My only regret about this wonderful project is that our good friend Vern will not be here," Heenan said. "He was so enthusiastic and excited about the prospect of this project."

Park officials aren't resting on their laurels.

"I'm already excited about looking forward to the next project," Krajniak said.



Photo by Brad Lindberg

Palmer Heenan, mayor of Grosse Pointe Park, Harrison John Lavins, 6, and grandparents Dolores and Paul Lavins join forces during ribbon cutting ceremonies on Wednesday, May 20, for the Dolores and Paul Lavins Activity Center at Windmill Pointe Park.