



Construction continues on Schar Center as workers put finishing touches on the exterior while the weather is nice. The new center will seat 5,400 people and will be the future home for Elon athletics.

CAROLINE BREHMAN | PHOTO EDITOR

SCHAR | from cover

large-scale events for Elon University. The 5,400 seats are about three times more than the number of seats in Alumni Gym, but Director of Athletics, Dave Blank, doesn't believe that 5,400 is too many.

"When you think about it going from a 1,600 [seat arena] to a 5,400 [seat arena], that's intimidating," Blank said. "There are going to be a lot of empty seats ... You have to look at it as an opportunity for growth, and we have to look at it as an opportunity for expansion of Elon University and Elon Athletics. It's a multipurpose facility so we're also thinking there are going to be other events in there like commencement ... So 5,400 seats becomes a good number to kind of meet both of those standards."

Going to any Phoenix home game in Alumni Gym, you're bound to look around and find a bunch of empty seats. The gym was almost empty as the Phoenix opened up in-conference play this past weekend. Though Blank knows there are going to be a lot of empty seats in the new arena that is triple the size, he believes it won't be long until all the seats are filled.

"As we continue to grow in our athletic stature, moving to the Colonial Athletic Association, for example, we hope that the support will be there and that size of an arena won't see too long before we're looking for more seats," Blank said. "That would be an amazing thing."

The new arena will not only affect current Elon students, faculty and community members, but Blank also believes that it will help Elon raise the standards in recruiting for

Phoenix athletics.

"When a recruit walks on campus, there are several questions that are on their mind and the one that is most on their mind is, 'Where do I play?'" Blank said. "You walk in [Schar Center] and it's an arena feel and that's what we need to compete in the Colonial [Athletic Association] and to get ourselves nationally involved and recruits will see that right away."

Scheduling the move

The move into the new Schar Center could happen sooner rather than later.

"The project is going very well," Blank said. "We've had great weather throughout the project, so I'd say that we're a little ahead of schedule."

Blank and Moore both say that there have been no problems or issues, which helps the project move along smoothly. According to Blank, there were no extended periods of rain from the beginning of the project until the roof was put up, meaning that any work from now on will be blocked from rain.

"The contractor is finishing enclosing the building," Moore said. "At that point, the contractor will be able to turn on the building heating and air systems so that they can continue with the installation of the finishes."

According to Moore, there is a long list of things that still need to be accomplished before any events can be held in the arena.

For the building shell, the last piece of storefront at the main entry needs to be installed.

For the site, crews need to finish paving the parking lot, finish pouring the sidewalks, put in irrigation and landscape the lot.

For the building systems, crews need to get heating and air systems operational and controlled.

For the interiors, crews inside need to put up drywall, paint, lay flooring, tile, casework, doors, etc.

When it comes to the owner provided items, furniture needs to be installed, as well as artwork, branding and AV equipment.

Though the list is long, if you ask Blank, he's still optimistic.

"We were hoping [occupancy] would be the beginning of the 2018 school year, but I think we will be able to do a little better than that," he said.

Goodbye, Alumni

Alumni Gym has been the primary host of Phoenix athletics since the building opened in 1949.

For long-time coaches and upperclassmen players on the volleyball team that call it home, the move to the new building won't be as easy as packing up the locker room inside Alumni Gym.

"It's pretty surreal," said Sydney Busa, a senior outside hitter on the volleyball team. "It hasn't really hit me that this will be the end. But it's been an honor to play for Elon and to have this opportunity, so it will be fun to shut this gym down."

"It's going to be sad, but it's going to be really fun being in the Schar Center," said junior defensive specialist Maddie Jaudon. "New change is always scary. This gym has been good to us, but we're ready to get over by all the other sports and make it easy to be where everybody else plays."

Head coach Mary Tendler has been at the helm of the program for the past 15 years, every year playing

inside the sacred walls of Alumni Gym. But she wants to finish with a bang.

"We talk about that a lot ... to do something special here in Alumni Gym in the last year ... and the players are into it," Tendler said. "We're so excited to move to the Schar Center, but we're also excited to make it a great last season here in Alumni Gym."

As for the man who oversees Phoenix athletics:

"It's nostalgic. There is a lot of history in that building," Blank said. "We're going to pay attention to that this year. There are going to be some markers that we place like, 'This is the last, first game,' things that are going to celebrate the building a little as we make our exit."

The future

Though the teams might not still be there, the gym isn't going anywhere. According to Blank, Campus Rec and intramural sports will use the space. Elon will also still use the space for medium-sized events on campus — ones in which McCrary theater will be too small to hold and the Schar Center will be too big to hold.

"It gives us a lot more flexibility and a lot more creativity that we can use on campus to provide programming for the students, so it's going to be exciting from that standpoint and Alumni is going to continue to be a part of that," Blank said.

Though Blank said he feels nostalgic about leaving the atmosphere of Alumni Gym, he still seems pretty excited to get the Schar Center up and running.

The last thing he said during the interview was, "Let's get it built."

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I DON'T THINK THAT WE FULLY KNOW HOW THIS IS GOING TO POSITIVELY IMPACT THE CAMPUS COMMUNITY. IT WILL, OF COURSE, SERVE FOR LARGE EVENTS — BOTH ACADEMIC AND ATHLETIC — BUT IT WILL NOW OPEN UP THE OPPORTUNITY TO HOST EVENTS THAT WE COULD NOT HAVE DREAMED OF HOSTING BEFORE.

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