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Tennis jewel on the hill

Mount's athletes will finally have

place to call home

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WOONSOCKET - Mount St. Charles Academy officials bounced across Logee Street this week to rally home their point.

After 39 seasons, **the** school's **tennis** teams are about to have a permanent home.

After clearing financial and governmental hurdles, a new six-court facility is under construction **on** a two-acre academy-owned parcel across **the** street from **the** main campus.

Mount's boys and girls **tennis** teams have been **the** nomads of athletics at Mount despite being two of **the** most successful programs.

Ever since academy Athletic Director Richard Lawrence started **the** boys **tennis** program and later **the** girls' teams, Mount has never had a permanent home.

Mount president Herve Richer said **the** concept of building new **tennis** courts surfaced a year ago when an anonymous donor pledged \$50,000 toward new courts and issued a challenge for other Mount grads to follow suit. **The** donor agreed to match every donation made, up to \$50,000, according to Richer.

"That gesture was really what got us investigating **the** possibilities," he said.

The parcel had been zoned for residential use, so Mount was required to obtain **the** approval of **the** Woonsocket Zoning Board of Review for a special use permit that allowed **the** project to move forward.

Because of **the** sloping topography of **the** land and ledge that has been encountered, **the** original estimated cost of **the** court complex has increased to about \$600,000. Richer said **the** bulk of **the** funding has already been identified and fund-raising efforts are continuing.

The project was put out to bid and **the** Catalano Construction Company of Cumberland, whose owners are Mount graduates, offered **the** winning bid.

Design engineer John Ford said that **the** new courts will have three levels, with two courts per level, and each of **the** two-court complexes surrounded by fencing.

"Because of **the** slope and ledge, it was either go to a unique tiered system, or make one flat surface with all six courts which would have required a steep wall at **the** end of **the** courts," said Ford. "This was far more esthetically pleasing."

Once **the** area is built, probably by spring, landscaping will be completed, giving **the** area a pleasing appearance, said Jason Catalano, project manager.

Tennis at Mount has a strong history despite **the** fact that **the** boys and girls teams have never had a place to call home, said Richer. **The** teams are bused five miles to **the** Highridge **Tennis** Club in Lincoln for practices and "home" matches.

Lawrence said when he began **the** boys **tennis** program at Mount in 1973, **the** academy only had two concrete **tennis** courts that were located near **the** baseball field. While **the** team could practice there, it wasn't really suitable for Interscholastic League play.

"We've been all over **the** place since then," he said. "We used **the** courts at Bernon Park, and at one point, we actually had people come in and line **the** hockey arena floor, which gave us **the** only indoor courts in **the** league."

A couple of years later, **the** program shifted to Dunn Memorial Park **on** Mason Street, and when **the** city built its new courts **on** Aylsworth Avenue, MSC **tennis** moved to that location. But then Woonsocket High School started its **tennis** program, and Mount was forced off those courts and into finding a new location.

The team used **the** courts in **the** former World War II Memorial State Park, which no longer exist.

Finally, in 1991, **the** team began leasing **the** Highridge facility, and they've been there ever since. Lawrence initiated **the** girls **tennis** program in 1984. Both programs have been tremendously successful.

Since **the** boys team was founded in 1973, it has won 20 championships, including four state titles. But it's **the** girls who have excelled. Since 1984, **the** Lawrence-coached teams have taken 23 championships, including eight state titles. In addition, **the** girls Junior Varsity team has won five championships, including two state titles, in **the** past six seasons.

"We've had that rich history despite **the** fact that we've never really had our own courts," said Richer. "That's quite a tribute to **the** student-athletes and **the** coaches."

Lawrence said **the** new courts are a personal dream come true, and expressed his thanks to **the** Mount alumni and their families who have generously donated to **the** project. He views **the** courts as far more than just a place where high school team members can practice and have matches. It would allow **the** academy to expand its physical education program, and even allow it to hold tournaments.

Lawrence pointed out that Mount has shared its other athletic facilities with **the** community, and said while it will be a secured site, "I can see a summer camper program and other events being hosted at this location."

On another front, **the** academy president reported that renovation work at Brother Adelard Arena is expected to begin shortly. Academy officials last year decided rather than build a new facility, a total renovation of **the** existing ice hockey rink would take place.

"That's **the** next athletic project," said Richer, pointing out that there are classroom and laboratory renovations ongoing at **the** academy, with a goal of having every one of them renovated within five years.

Lawrence, who retired from coaching **tennis** this year but who still practices with **the** teams **on** a daily basis, said it's going to be strange to be able to just walk across Logee Street and be at practice or at matches starting next fall.

"This," he said, "Is not a resource just for **tennis**, but for **the** whole school community. It's been a long-time dream, but until they started to dig, I had to pinch myself to make sure that it was a reality."