

# SERF



Fig. 1. SERF from Ogg Hall 1987. [Series 9/5, SERF, jf-94]

*On the planning boards for many years, the third unit of the University gymnasiums was built in 1982, named the Southeast Recreational Facility and known as SERF.*

This project was in the planning stage for so long that its first incarnation, that of a women's gymnasium, was as dead as bloomers by the time of construction. When Gyms I and II were built in the early 1960s, the student population center was near the lake-shore dorms at the west end of campus, and the gyms were built near there. After the southeast dorms were built, it became obvious that recreational facilities were needed on the east end of campus. An estimated 10,000 students in that area were serviced mostly by a combination of Lathrop Hall for the women and the Red Gym for the men.

The "East Campus Physical Education Facility" was placed in eleventh place on the 1975-1977 priority list, over the objections of some regents who would not support a recreational facility over any academic ones. During 1975 the University's income from the state was curtailed drastically: the state granted less than 30 per cent of the \$50 million in construction funds requested by the regents. It was clear that the new gym would not come quickly or easily.<sup>1</sup>

A program statement was written by the building committee, and the department of planning and construction in June 1976. This justification paper leaned heavily on the outmoded recreational facilities available to women, citing the heavy use of the old pool and gym at Lathrop Hall. This paper also reflected the early idea that the site for the gym should be on the block of the recently completed

Educational Science and Teacher Education Buildings, since Physical Education is part of the School of Education. By 1978 the site near Educational Science had also been discarded. Early in 1979 the state building commission responded to a proposal for a \$11.5 million facility by recommending reductions in scope, including the size of the pool, faculty areas, and spectator accommodations. These changes reduced the cost to \$9.3 million, which the commission approved. Legislative approval came in the summer of 1979. The remainder of 1979 was used in replanning to account for the reduction in size.<sup>2</sup>

The next major problem to solve was the site. This issue was unusually complicated because of overlapping plans. The University after discarding the site near the Education complex, selected the 600 Block of University Avenue, a parking lot jointly owned by the University and the city of Madison. The city objected to this site because of ongoing plans for urban renewal in the area. The city and the University investigated five other locations, including three on Dayton Street and one on Johnson, before deciding on the 700 block of Dayton Street in May 1980. With funding approved and a site selected the project was underway in earnest.<sup>3</sup>

The land at the Dayton Street site, bounded by Murray, Dayton, and Lake Streets and the railroad tracks was purchased from the U.W. Building Corporation and the Illinois Central Railroad for a total of \$291,000 in state funds in November 1980.<sup>4</sup>

Some resistance to the funding for the gym arose in 1981. According to the Daily Cardinal, it was agreed by students in the early 1970s that segregated student fees were to be used to help finance the gym but as the project dragged on the Wisconsin Student Association called for a student referendum on the subject. Nothing resulted of this affair, but discontent over this use of segregated fees lingered throughout the project's life. In June 1981 the regents voted to approve the concept and budget for the new gym. In that same month, the state building commission approved the final plans and granted authority to bid construction at a budget of \$9.5 million. In July 1981 the city of Madison granted the rezoning request for the 700 block of West Dayton Street.<sup>5</sup>

Ground-breaking took place on June 16, 1982, by general contractor Anthony Grignano of Madison, with a contract for \$4.35 million. Total contracted costs were \$9.5 million. Of this amount \$6 million came from gifts and grants, about half of that from the accumulated segregated student funds, and \$3.3 million in state funds. The schedule called for completion by September 1983.<sup>6</sup>

No particular difficulties were encountered during construction and the facility opened to student use on October 20, 1983. A formal dedication was held October 19, 1983, moderated by chancellor Irving Shain. It featured the unveiling of a sculpture at the Dayton Street entrance titled "Interspirit" by James Russell of Redondo Beach California. Use of the new recreational facility for class work began the following semester in January of 1984. After 15 years of planning and waiting, the third part (after the Natatorium and Gym II on the west end of campus) of the University's physical education plant was a reality.<sup>7</sup>

The finished building is a four level rectangle 300 by 100 feet, framed in steel with concrete block walls, sheathed in face brick and aluminum wall panels. A striking external feature of the design are the four protruding polygonal stairwells at the corners of the building. Level 0 contains 12 racquetball courts, mechanical systems, and storage areas. Level 1 hold weight rooms, the upper part of the lower courts, and part of the pool tank. The 65 meter pool (the University's largest) is on level 2, and can be partitioned by moveable bulkheads for simultaneous multiple uses. Locker rooms, offices, and the lobby are also on level 2. Level 3 contains two large (113 by 100 foot) gymnasiums, and the upper part of the pool area. Level 4 is a one-tenth mile running track suspended above the gymnasium area. Late in 1984 a large part of level 0, which had been left unfinished to meet budget restrictions was finished to provide extra weight training facilities. Some planning has taken place with a view toward expanding the building on the west side.

The new gym was an immediate success by 1986 it was hosting from 2000 to 4500 users per day.

The building hosted classes in the departments of physical education, education and dance, and recreational sports. When the aerobics and jazzercise movement struck in the mid 1980s attendance reached as high as 600 per class.<sup>2</sup> This raised a problem because the constant synchronized bouncing movement began to cause parts of the building to move visibly. After some initial concern and the reduction of class size to a maximum of 150, a structural engineering study concluded that the building was safe and presented no danger.<sup>8</sup>

- 1) *Regent's Minutes*, December 6, 1968, November 1, 1974 and exhibit I-1.
- 2) Facilities Requirements and Justification, June 1, 1976, series 4/31/9-3 box 4; *Regent's Minutes*, February 7, 1975; *Daily Cardinal*, November 10, 1978. *Wisconsin State Journal*, March 14, 1979.
- 3) *Madison Press Connection*, September 6, 1979; *Daily Cardinal*, November 19, 1979; *Wisconsin State Journal*, March 14, 1979; *Capital Times*, January 30, 1980; Edsall to Springman, March 6, 1980, Agency Request for State Building Commission Action, May 1980, series 4/31/9-3 box 4; *Regent's Minutes*, May 9, 1980.
- 4) *Regent's Minutes*, November 7, 1980.
- 5) *Daily Cardinal*, February 9, 1981; *Regent's Minutes*, June 5, 1981; Peterson to Bower, July 22, 1981, Agency Request for State Building Commission Action, June 1980, series 4/31/9-3 box 4; *Daily Cardinal*, February 9, 1981.
- 6) UW News Release, June 14, 1982, Agency Request for State Building Commission Action, May 1980, series 4/31/9-3 box 4; *Regent's Minutes*, June 11, 1982; *Wisconsin State Journal*, October 6, 1982; *Badger Herald*, July 8, 1982.
- 7) *Daily Cardinal*, September 1, 1983, October 20, 1983; *Badger Herald*, August 22, 1983; *Capital Times*, October 18, 1983; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, November/December 1983 p. 19.
- 8) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, May/June, 1986, p. 16; *Capital Times*, March 24, 1987; *Daily Cardinal*, April 9, 1987.