

Competition heats up for health-club members

MVP Sportplex already boasts near-capacity membership of 5,000 since opening in March
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KENTWOOD -- It is close to home, has state-of-the-art equipment and offers a fleet of fitness trainers. That has been enough to bring David Lowe to MVP Sportsplex for a daily workout since the facility opened in March.

The 96,000-square-foot fitness center, owned by the Richard DeVos family in partnership with Spectrum Health, works for the Kentwood man to rehabilitate his shoulder after having surgery on an old baseball injury.

"I've been here every day but Easter," said Lowe, 52. "The trainers are very interchangeable. There's always somebody available."

MVP, a \$17 million project on 10 acres at Burton Street and East Paris Avenue SE, already boasts a near-capacity membership of 5,000, said Benny Hardouin, director of operations.

Helping those people be fit is the aim of the 105 employees, and their know-how will be especially helpful to visitors such as Lowe when construction of a two-story medical complex is completed in November.

Wolverine Building Inc., which also built the sportsplex, is erecting a 30,000-square-foot medical building on the southeast corner of the campus. Its services will focus on physical therapy and sports medicine, likely from providers such as Spectrum and Michigan Medical PC.

"They'll use the club as part of their training ground," Hardouin said. "They'll do some work over (at the medical building) and then walk over here and jump in the pool or lift weights."

MVP was modeled after the 365,000-square-foot RDV Sportsplex the DeVos family opened in 1998 in Orlando, Fla., in a joint venture with Florida Hospital.

There is a gymnasium with two 75-foot basketball courts, a 25-meter indoor swimming pool and adjacent splash pool, three studio rooms for programs and a fitness floor with more than 300 pieces of equipment, including 40 treadmills with built-in television screens.

Other features include a sauna, steam room, six indoor tennis courts and a child-care center with interactive video games such as a dance pad. Plasma television screens are scattered throughout the building.

Set to open this summer are outdoor pools and a two-story water slide.

"It's new and the equipment's incredible," said Heather Bieker, a 38-year old mother of four. "It's a place I can bring my kids on the weekend, and we can all have fun."

The addition of MVP fuels competition among Southeast Side health clubs. The facility sits near East Hills and Michigan Athletic Club, both owned by St. Mary's Health Management company.

Hardouin said MVP lacks some features of the older clubs -- there are no indoor track or racquetball courts, for example -- and tries to make up for it with a bright building design and high-tech equipment.

"There's obviously enough people in this area to sustain our health club," he said. "This is the demographic we wanted. We've found a market. I think we've found a good corner."

MVP also is renovating the athletic facility of the downtown Peninsular Club. Members of the Kentwood MVP will be able to use the downtown facility for an additional fee, Hardouin said.

Also downtown, the YMCA this spring plans to open a new 159,000- square-foot, \$29 million facility west of U.S. 131 at 475 Lake Michigan Drive NW.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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