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Taking Partnership to a New Level

Creative Partnership Nets Springboro Schools an \$11 Million Athletic Complex at No Cost

Go to a Springboro High School football game in Springboro, Ohio, and the game won't be the only thing that catches your eye. It will be hard to keep your attention on the field when you're sitting in one of the most remarkable sports stadiums in the area.

Springboro Community City Schools' athletic facility is undergoing an \$11 million facelift that includes a new synthetic turf field, resurfaced track, press box, more concession stands and restrooms, a weight training facility and a spirit shop. Grandstand seating will double to seat 2,000 Springboro fans and 1,000 specta-

tors on the visitor's side.

The best part? The school is getting the stadium at absolutely no cost, thanks to some creative thinking from the community, the school district and SHP Leading Design.

Not content with the current athletic facilities, several parents got the ball rolling. They worked with the Springboro school district and came up with an idea to partner with a local healthcare facility to secure the funding required to turn the current field into a sports complex worthy of a pro athlete. SHP helped the district navigate the design process and construction challenges of integrating the new amenities with the existing facility, turning the dream into reality.

Medical Building is Centerpiece of Athletic Complex

The centerpiece of the new athletic facility is the 40,000-square-foot,





three-story EduCare medical building located directly behind the field, on a campus including the junior high, high school and an elementary school. Once complete, the athletic complex will rival those of most colleges.

The first floor of the EduCare building will house 12,500 square feet of space for locker rooms, weight rooms, trainers' rooms, coaches' offices and meeting space. The second floor and most of the third floor will be medical office space. The rest of the third floor will be a 60-person-capacity press box overlooking the field.

This new facility will be one of the most impressive school athletic complexes in the area, but what truly makes it unique is that it was borne from a partnership between the Springboro Community City Schools and Miami Valley Hospital. This partnership represents one of the first times in the state of Ohio that a public education organization partnered with a private company to form a mutually beneficial business relationship.

Under the partnership, Miami Valley Hospital purchased naming rights to Springboro's athletic stadium—now

called CareFlight Field—for 15 years at a cost of \$2 million. This sum will pay for installing synthetic turf on the football field, resurfacing the track and upgrading the grandstand and press box.

In addition to purchasing naming rights to the stadium, Miami Valley Hospital is also funding all construction costs for the \$9 million EduCare medical building.

Miami Valley Hospital signed a contract with Springboro Community City Schools to lease the second floor and part of the third floor as office space for the next 22 years. After that time, Springboro Community Schools will take possession of the entire building to use in any way they see fit.

“Athletic improvements such as this would typically require taxpayers to pass a levy; not an easy task in today's economic environment,” said Dr. David Baker, Springboro school superintendent. “Since Miami Valley Hospital is funding all of the stadium renovations and the construction of the EduCare building, the taxpayers won't owe a dime.”

Economic Downturn Required Creativity to Fund Improvements

This unique partnership evolved from an informal survey conducted by Mark Durso, a community member with two children in the school district. Durso conducted the survey with local parents to reevaluate the current athletic facilities and identify areas for improvement.

“Springboro has grown at a tremendous rate, from a small district to a Division-I high school. This [growth] was putting a burden on the current facilities,” said Durso. “The school was running out of room, and some athletic facilities were being used as classrooms to accommodate the growing student body.”

According to his survey, many parents felt the same way.

“A majority of parents were concerned about the quality and safety of the football field and track,” explained Durso. “The school needed a larger weight room and better equipped locker rooms. We also believed a synthetic field would be safer for student athletes and could be used year-round without being torn up.”

Durso presented his results to the school board, which acknowledged the need for improvements, but struggled with how to fund them.

“Public school districts must be fiscally conservative as to what they ask for, since they rely on public support to operate. They also must maintain a level of trust with the community and only ask for financial support for those things the district truly needs,” said Baker. “A new athletic field and stadium improvements probably weren’t high on the taxpayers’ list of things to pay for.”

Baker recalled a past arrangement between the school district and the Warren County Career Center to build an administrative office building for the Springboro Schools. Financial donations from the career center and other local businesses paid for the construction. No taxpayer dollars were needed. He thought the district could arrange a similar partnership, but on a much larger scale to fund the athletic improvements.

“It’s challenging enough to pass an operating levy in economic times like these, let alone a levy for athletic improvements,” explained Baker.

Baker and Durso approached Tim Grimes, an attorney working with Miami Valley Hospital, to discuss a



partnership. Miami Valley Hospital was looking to grow its operation in Springboro. It had a small presence in the district and was facing growing competition for another hospital in the area. After two years, the hospital and Springboro schools reached an agreement that would meet each other’s individual business needs.

Not a Donation, a Legitimate Business Partnership

“This wasn’t a donation. This was a legitimate partnership, which had to make business sense for the hospital,” emphasized Grimes. “We were able to hammer out an agreement that provided Springboro schools with a new stadium and provided Miami Valley Hospital with access to new patients and revenue streams.”

For its \$11 million investment, the hospital has established a strong foothold in the area. The stadium naming rights alone will significantly raise the hospital’s awareness in the area, as 70,000 potential customers see the stadium’s hospital-branded signage as they travel nearby State Route 741.

The hospital will also generate revenue by leasing out approximately 26,000 square feet of second- and third-floor office space to other

healthcare providers such as general practitioners and orthopedists. The hospital can also produce revenue through patient referrals from these healthcare providers.

Lastly, because the EduCare building will be constructed using funds borrowed from the Ohio School Pool, a state fund set up for school projects, and at a 4.6 percent interest rate, Miami Valley Hospital has secured capital at a much lower rate than through conventional means.

“This is significant because it allows the hospital to construct a medical complex without using its own financial resources,” said Grimes. “Now the hospital can spend its financial resources on the latest medical equipment and technology to attract more patients instead of financing the construction of a new facility.”

While Springboro Community City Schools will carry the loan, Miami Valley Hospital will make all payments, and it will recoup funds through leasing office space to other healthcare practitioners. The benefits for Springboro Community City Schools are just as significant.

“The school receives a great stadium and updated athletic facilities at no cost,” said Baker. “Furthermore, be-

cause the field has been replaced with synthetic turf, the school and taxpayers will save thousands of dollars on field maintenance. The synthetic turf also provides a safer surface on which our athletes and marching band can perform.”

The school also can generate additional revenue by hosting athletic events, band invitational events and community events at the stadium.

Mixed-Use Building Presented Unique Design Challenges

The EduCare building presented numerous design challenges for SHP. Since the EduCare building is a mixed-use building, providing educational, assembly and business use together, it had to incorporate a “clockwork” design, where various components for different purposes have to work together structurally.

“The most significant challenge was integrating components that typically don’t fit together, including the stadium, grandstands, press box, tenant space and athletic space, into a cohesive design,” said Todd Thackery, architect from SHP.

The exterior of the EduCare building also had to correspond with the common visual identity of the existing structures, which included the high school, junior high school, an elementary school, bus facility and

school board office. SHP designed the exterior of the building to complement the others, using the same color patterns and features such as a sloped shingle roof and brick exterior.

“One of the more unique design elements was integrating the press box into the building. You don’t often see a press box in the middle of a health-care facility,” continued Thackery. “We located the press box on the third floor of the EduCare building so it aligned with the existing grandstands and would provide an unobstructed view of the field. The press box is accessible from either the building stairway and elevator or from the grandstands itself.”

Thackery explained another challenge SHP faced was taking into account how to best separate students from medical staff and adults seeking medical attentions.

“School facilities will be accessed through a side entrance, while health-care professionals and patients will enter the building from the front,” he said. “They can then take the stairwell or elevator to the second and third floors.”

Other Districts Exploring Similar Partnerships

If interest levels are any indication, public-private partnerships such as this are becoming a trend. Baker, Durso, Grimes and Thackery recent-

ly attended an Ohio School Board Association meeting to discuss their partnership and provide direction for other school districts interested in similar opportunities.

“I’ve been fielding several calls from districts across the state looking for advice on launching similar partnerships. It’s hard to keep up with them,” said Baker.

Other school districts have already reached out to private companies in the area to explore similar opportunities. Some schools have entered into athletic facility sponsorship agreements, and at least one other district has reached an agreement with another hospital to build a community facility. However, the Springboro Community City Schools-Miami Valley Hospital partnership provides a much broader range of services than any other partnership.

“It’s all about looking past the obvious to find a creative solution that fits your needs based on what you have,” explained Thackery. “Springboro Community City Schools had two very desirable assets: a great location and available land. These assets made the partnership with Miami Valley Hospital possible.”

“School districts need to look for ways to get more for less, and partnerships like this offer the perfect opportunity to secure funding for school improvement projects without placing a financial burden on the community,” said Baker.

In economic times like these, other school districts might quickly follow Springboro’s lead.

