

Lee's Y on the move – in more ways than one

SANFORD — The Lee County YMCA has long been a haven for people young and old, offering everything from fitness equipment to after-school programs. And now it's on the move – not just figuratively, but literally as well.

The nonprofit organization, a branch of the YMCA of the Triangle, begins a new chapter early this summer by opening its state-of-the-art fitness center in the former Sanford Nautilus building near Central Carolina Hospital off Carthage Street.

Extensive renovations under way for months are crafting a bright, contemporary space with new exercise equipment and locker rooms, a refreshed racquetball court, drop-in child care and even an upgraded indoor pool.

Most importantly, says Executive Director Zac West, it expands offerings and opportunities for a branch that opened its current location – in the Spring Lane Galleria shopping center – more than seven years ago. Plans are already in the works to offer aqua aerobics, more group exercise classes, swimming lessons and competitive swimming with the YOTA Swim Team for all ages and skill levels at the new site.

Expansion had been a hot topic for years. But it took a while for the Lee County YMCA to find the right option and get in a position to move from its rented location into a long-term center of its own. That's when the hard work began. Plans were designed and a capital campaign led by local investment advisor Kel Normann kicked off in November to raise the money needed to purchase and renovate the building, a process West describes as “very positive and successful.”

The ambitious, \$3 million fundraising drive is starting to wind down now — West expects to hit the final target some time later this year — and that throws everyone's focus back onto serving the community.

While West says there are some things he and his staff would like to see happen down the road, nobody is committing to any specific path. That's because the Lee County YMCA is constantly transforming itself to accommodate whatever is happening outside its doors.

“You know, right now we don't have anything definite in place,” West said about his organization's direction over the next decade. “We're just excited about opening the new facility and excited to get settled and see how the community shapes us — to see what needs we can meet in the community and just let it take us from there.”