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News Release

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IU President Michael A. McRobbie, First Lady Lori Burns McRobbie, Milt Cole, Jean Cole, Carmella Cole, Brittany Cole, Keith Cole. Candy Cole, Tori Cole Wagoner, Randy Cole, and Interim Chancellor Susan Sciame-Giesecke at the dedication of the Milt and Jean Cole Family Fitness and Wellness Center.

Campus benefactors honored at dedication of the Milt and Jean Cole Family Fitness and Wellness Center

KOKOMO, Ind. — A long-desired dream comes true for Indiana University Kokomo students, with the opening of the Milt and Jean Cole Family Fitness and Wellness Center.

For years, students asked for a place to exercise on campus, to be with their friends, to build their community. They said a fitness center is an essential part of the college life experience, the key missing piece on campus.

Wednesday (September 18), IU President Michael A. McRobbie officially dedicated and named the Cole Fitness Center, celebrating its opening with the campus community and honoring the generosity of the Cole family.

Milt and Jean Cole and their family, owners of Cole Hardwood Inc., Logansport, gave $1.25 million for the fitness center, the largest cash gift in campus history.

Milt and Jean each spoke during the ceremony about their dedication to philanthropy, urging those attending to get involved.

“I do believe this center has created excitement here in Kokomo,” Milt said. “It has elevated the positive energy. The iron is hot; it’s time to strike. I encourage everyone to get behind the movement. It’s a golden opportunity to get something done in Kokomo.”

Jean thanked friends and family who came for the dedication, saying it touched her to see so many attending. She hoped students did not just see them as people who could give a donation, but would learn from and follow their example. She pointed out her sons and daughters-in-law, Randy and Candy Cole, and Keith and Carmella Cole, and their grandchildren, seated in the front row, saying they all learned to work and to be generous.

“What mother could dream of a better life lesson of giving, that Milt and I can pass on to our children, and they can pass on to their children,” she said. “Life is nothing but choices, and saying yes, and walking through doors.”

As an exercise science and nutrition student, Tara Lees is grateful for the chance not only to work out in the fitness center, but also to take classes in it and to have a job there.

“I thank the Cole family for being so generous and giving us this opportunity to expand our college experience,” she said. “It’s nice to have hands-on learning experiences, rather than just watching a video or reading a book. Having a fitness center here makes so much more possible for our program, and it gives students a chance to live a healthier lifestyle.”

Kelley Baer, a radiography student from Kokomo, said it means a lot to students to have a high quality, attractive, convenient, place to exercise on campus.

“We are so grateful to the Coles,” she said. “This is a gift that is going to keep on giving for many years.”

Most excited about having a nice place to shower and change after running, Joanna Davis, Westfield, a student in the radiography program, looks forward to running on the fitness center track during the winter.

“I hope the Coles know how much this means to all of us,” she said. “You feel better when you exercise before or after your classes. We’re so happy to finally have this center.”

Since the Cole Fitness Center opened in August, it has been a hub of activity. Students, along with faculty and staff, flocked to join and started walking on the track and treadmills, lifting weights in the strength training area, and performing reps on the machines. The athletes exercise there as well, doing yoga and participating in core training.

The Cole Fitness Center is in the lower level of the library, in space formerly used for storage. When architect Rick Dalhstrom Jr., from MSKTD & Associates, first saw what was called the "rock room," it was essentially concrete walls and a gravel floor, with no light.

"I had a hard time imagining it as a fitness center initially," he said. He worked with interior designer Amber Kolkman to choose the right lighting, colors, and ceilings to create a vibrant, inviting space.

Kolkman designed the Cole Fitness Center with an industrial feel, as a nod to Kokomo's long manufacturing history. Varying ceiling heights and bright blue and green walls provide an energetic vibe, achieving her goal of making you forget you are in a basement.

"It's inviting and energetic, and encourages people to come work out," Kolkman said.

Myles Hattabaugh, a junior computer information technology student from Kokomo, thinks the center will bring more students to IU Kokomo. He exercises there four or more times weekly.

"It's really nice," he said. "They have a lot of equipment for a lot of people. The quantity and quality of everything is really good. I like being able to work out around my class schedule."

Hannah Gray, a junior computer information technology major, likes being able to exercise at school, rather than having to drive home to Noblesville.

"I like that the center has a lot for girls and guys both, not just a lot of weights," she said. "I like the variety of the equipment here, and that it is for all students, not just the athletes."

Nursing student Taylor Backes, Carmel, exercises in the fitness center every time she is on campus and understands the importance of maintaining good physical health.

"Health and healthy living is an integral part of nursing," she said. "Having the center here supports that. It is a great addition to our campus. It's a great way to relieve a little stress and take a break between classes."

Interim Chancellor Susan Sciame-Giesecke said the Coles are long-term benefactors to the campus, starting with a leadership gift for the library in 1992. They also provided the wood for the stage floor in Kresge Auditorium, where the dedication ceremony took place, and supported an endowment for science equipment.

“To know them is to know generosity, coupled with humility,” she said.

Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.

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