

THE HISTORY OF THE CLARK SPORTS CENTER

The First 125 Years

In 1891, the first Alfred Corning Clark Gymnasium opened in Cooperstown. The building occupied the former site of a hardware store at the corner of Main and Fair Street. An indoor track surfaced with canvas circled the upper portion of the main activity room. Bowling alleys, locker rooms and a large “general purpose” gym floor were also included. The facility proved to be an instant success. By the end of the first year membership had already exceeded 200 people. Membership fees were \$3.00 to \$6.00 per year for adults and surprisingly for the times, women were encouraged to be full participants. Classes included a broad range of activities from fencing, high jumping, boxing and weight lifting to running and general fitness. In 1924, a swimming and diving program was introduced at the present Country Club site on Lake Otsego.

In May 1929, the original gymnasium was demolished and a new one was erected. Edward Severin Clark, an activist in the Cooperstown community, was concerned that the gym should not remain closed for an unnecessarily long period of time. Stonemasons and construction workers labored throughout the winter. The building, in much the same form that it still appears on Main Street, opened on May 30, 1930. Swimming, basketball, squash courts and a steam bath were among the new features. Four bowling lanes were added with more classes and longer operating hours. The second ACC Gymnasium became an active and vital part of the recreational and social life of the community. Since the Second World War, basketball leagues for children and adults, organized competitive swimming, squash tournaments, water safety instruction, ballroom dancing, aerobics, and a range of other activities provided a unique sports center at the heart of the village.

In 1983, The Clark Foundation announced its intention to build a larger facility on land donated by Mr. Stephen C. Clark, Jr. one-half mile south of the village, opposite the Iroquois Farm Estate on Susquehanna Avenue. The community's growth and the need for modernized facilities dictated a much larger building. Construction was started for the new gymnasium in 1985. The new facility represented a significant expansion of staff, equipment, programs, operating hours and services. Led by Alfred C. Clark, Jr., enormous creative planning went into every detail, from its range of Nautilus exercise equipment, aerobics studio, lighting design and sound system to the climbing walls and Outward Bound Challenge Course. Traditional features included a large gym floor, a swimming

pool and an indoor track. Other additions were an eating area, conference room, and saunas.

With the dedication on October 5, 1986, the third ACC Gymnasium continued its ninety four-year commitment to the community. There was a successful expansion of traditional family programs and an addition of outreach activities for Cooperstown and the surrounding areas including New York City.

In the 1990's, traditional activities such as basketball, swimming, bowling, and racquet sports were renewed and strengthened. Many new activities that were ushered in with the opening of the new facility in 1986 such as Outward Bound, adventure programming and various outreach activities were given additional energy through careful review and adjustment. In June of 1994, the Board of Directors of The Clark Foundation decided that a more modern name representing the organization's broadened scope and comprehensiveness was needed. The ACC Gymnasium was renamed The Clark Sports Center.

In the late 1990's and early 2000's, a process to establish a focused mission and vision was underway. The following is the result:

Mission: It is the primary mission of The Clark Sports Center to take an active role in the health, fitness, recreational and educational life of the Village of Cooperstown and its surrounding area. Specific objectives include safe, high quality youth, adult, and family programming as well as outreach programs aimed at addressing the needs of the underserved local populations.

Vision: It is the vision of The Clark Sports Center to provide exceptional opportunities for those we serve to experience a lifetime of fitness and fun through education and recreation.

As part of this development process, management invested two years to develop benchmarks to measure attendance, membership, perceptions, and financial data. This information helps measure the success of any program or customer service improvements.

In 2010, management staff began a process to develop a five year strategic plan with the intent to explore what positive changes could be made to the current operation as it related to:

1. Sustaining the mission
2. Improving services to the community
3. Fostering growth and retention in membership, and
4. Maintaining the level of support from The Clark Foundation

The result of the process was a determination that the Sports Center seeks to be a modern facility, programmatically up-to-date with recreational and fitness trends, and financially sustainable. And because membership is both an indicator of these characteristics and a means to achieve them, the Sports Center set an end point of its five-year plan a goal of 5,000 active members by December of 2017.

In 2013, a focus on the current and future needs of The Clark Sports Center resulted in rethinking the current footprint of the building and exploring an expansion that would solve the issues around lack of space and growing membership. Construction on an expansion is planned and includes a larger fitness center, multiple group fitness and meeting rooms, a renovated aquatics area, family locker rooms, new racquetball and squash courts, an expansive lobby with a new high rocking climbing wall, storage space, and additional offices.

The Clark Sports Center continues to provide an unmatched quality of life for all area residents and visitors in and out of Cooperstown. At this time the organization's leadership and staff are committed to improving the fitness, recreational and educational experience of all visitors. An effort has been made to review, consolidate and then build on its already excellent programs and services.

History of Directors

1891-1927	Professor William Martin
1928-1942	William Beattie
1942-1963	Colonel Simon Acoutin
1963-1986	Malcolm Brooks
1986-1992	Geoffrey Childs
1993-1999	J. Bart Morrison
2000-2007	Brad Feik

2009-2012 Dion Wade
2012- Val Paige