



PHOENIXVILLE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

PRESS RELEASE

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PHOENIXVILLE SCHOOLS REACH AGREEMENT WITH NON-PROFIT TO BUILD AQUATIC CENTER

Phoenixville Area School District has entered into a unique partnership, that will bring a world-class swimming facility to the Phoenixville community with no cost to taxpayers. Led by a committed group of volunteers, the Valley Forge Aquatic Center, Inc. (VFAC), a Pennsylvania registered non-profit corporation is working to raise \$25,000,000 to build an aquatic center on land owned by the Phoenixville Area School District (PASD) in Schuylkill Township. The aquatic center is currently going by the name of The Philadelphia Aquatic Center. When completed, the facility is slated to include an Olympic –sized pool, a diving well, and a separate shallow warm water pool for youth swim lessons and aqua therapy by healthcare providers.

Dr. Alan Fegley, Superintendent of PASD, describes the project as “an amazing example of a public/private partnership. They (the non-profit) will be using a piece of land that has been unused and building something for the public good.”

The impetus for the project began five years ago with Dan Cooke, a volunteer swim coach with the Phoenixville YMCA and the parent of All-American swimmer Maddie Cooke (a 2017 PAHS graduate who is now swimming for Penn State University). Cooke was all too aware of the scarcity of lane time for competitive swimmers, water polo athletes, synchronized swimmers and divers—not just in Phoenixville, but this entire area. He recruited other like-minded individuals and raised \$30,000 to do a feasibility study, completed by The Isaac Sports Group. The study showed the aquatic center was needed for community aquatic programming, local swim teams and regional events for high caliber athletes. Furthermore, the study demonstrated how similar facilities built across the country over the past 10 years have developed strong financial models serving all three markets.

The group also gathered sobering statistics on drowning accidents:

- Drowning is the NUMBER 1 cause of all deaths for children age 1-4 years except for birth defects
- Drowning is the SECOND leading cause of injury-related deaths for children age 1-14 years (after motor vehicle crashes)



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- The statistics for minority children are even more grim, with death rates up to ten times higher than national averages.

Armed with these facts, the group created a three-fold mission statement: to teach children to swim and help them develop through aquatic sports, to inspire excellence in competitive aquatics, and to encourage lifelong fitness for people of all ages and abilities.

Dan Cooke, now the President of VFAC speaks passionately about their desire to “fill that space in a really meaningful way, and teaching all kids to swim.” He continued, “We want to drown-proof Chester County, and we’re going to start with Phoenixville.” Part of the PASD lease includes swim lessons for every first grader, unique to our region, but common in Europe.

The group also envisions senior centers and retirement homes, healthcare organizations and others utilizing the facility on a daily basis. “This started with the competitive swimmers in mind, but it has become so much more. We are looking at the good this can do for our entire community,” Cooke added.

The Phoenixville community will be direct beneficiaries, with discounts and preferred times for pool usage. The broader potential economic impact could include a boost for local hotels, restaurants, and merchants, as the venue would attract major swimming events.

The targeted date of operation is July 1, 2023. The management and operation of the facility will lie with VFAC, with PASD receiving lease payments for the land in the form of credits for swimming; diving, water polo, and learn to swim program time, a total value of more than \$1.1 million over the life of the lease. Lisa Longo, President of the Phoenixville Area School Board and acting currently as the District representative on the new board is excited about the project, "Finding ways to improve our community while possibly saving lives is an amazing opportunity for us all," said Longo. . “We all look forward to helping make this a reality."

The group is currently working toward that end, starting with a fundraising campaign targeting key contributors. Six-time Olympic medalist Brendan Hansen and former Havertown native is a recent addition to the Advisory Board, bringing an added layer of expertise to the team. The board of VFAC is looking forward to working with him as they bring their vision of a world-class aquatic center to southeastern PA.

For more information about the Philadelphia Aquatic Center, visit www.phillyaquaticcenter.org

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