

New Multipurpose Events Complex Planned for UW-Eau Claire with Sonnentag Foundation Donation

EAU CLAIRE — Zorn Arena has been the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire’s largest events venue — with a capacity of 3,300 — since its construction in 1951. Recently, the Sonnentag Foundation pledged approximately \$10 million in gifts of land and money to serve as the site of a privately funded multipurpose events center that would accommodate at least 7,500 people and replace Zorn Arena.

John and Carolyn Sonnentag, who were University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire students during the 1960s, have pledged the significant gift of land and money to the UW-Eau Claire Foundation in support of the events center. Barry Moullet, chair of the UW-Eau Claire Foundation board of directors, said construction of the multipurpose events facility will require additional private philanthropy.

Believing that it’s time for their alma mater and the surrounding community to have a facility capable of meeting today’s demands for larger-scale events, the Sonnentags have committed to transfer ownership of 21 acres along Menomonie Street in Eau Claire to Blugold Real Estate, a subsidiary of the UW-Eau Claire Foundation.

The 21 acres is currently owned by County Materials Corporation, the Sonnentag’s third generation family-owned concrete manufacturing company, headquartered in Marathon, Wisconsin. County Materials will continue to maintain its business presence in the community and supply construction and landscape product lines to the Eau Claire market for years to come. County Materials, which employs 33 people in the Eau Claire facility, is currently looking at alternative property options.

The company originally purchased the Eau Claire property from Fehr Concrete in 1989, and manufactured concrete block, concrete pipe and prestress concrete bridge girders under the name County Concrete until the name change to County Materials in 2003.

In recognition of the Sonnentag Foundation’s donation to the UW-Eau Claire Foundation, the new facility will be named the County Materials Event and Recreation Complex. The new

complex will be sited close to Hobbs Ice Arena and Carson Park, creating an appealing recreation and events district for the university and community.

Also in development are arrangements for the Sonnentag Foundation to purchase the property directly to the east of County Materials' site, currently occupied by Student Transit-Eau Claire Inc. The Sonnentag Foundation would then donate the Student Transit property to Blugold Real Estate so that the area for development would extend from County Materials' site east to Hobbs Ice Arena, Way said.

Kimera Way, UW-Eau Claire Foundation president, said the UW-Eau Claire Foundation is still in the early stages of planning for the development of the Menomonie Street land.

"The Foundation will focus during the 2014-15 academic year to complete the planning, seeking input from students, the university and the general community on how to maximize the benefit of the Sonnentag Foundations' transformational gift," Way said.