



Everything New Orleans

Jesuit High is building \$5 million athletic complex in Metairie

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Richard Rainey, The Times-Picayune

In its years on a corner of South Carrollton Avenue and Banks Street, **Jesuit High School** has fielded home teams, but they haven't played on a home field.

That will change next year.

The New Orleans school is building a \$5 million **athletic complex** along Cold Storage Road just off Airline Drive in Metairie, about two miles from its campus. With construction scheduled to begin any day, the work will add an artificial turf practice field and a 1,300-seat stadium -- lights and all -- by late spring, school spokesman Pierre DeGruy said.

"It's going to be a nice stadium," he said.

Its inception goes back a ways. The school had searched for a lot closer to campus, but nothing was large enough, DeGruy said. It settled on a chicken warehouse left abandoned and crumbling after **Hurricane Katrina** struck five years ago.

The complex, which includes a large pavilion, will accommodate outdoor sports except varsity football home games, DeGruy said. Those will continue to be played at Tad Gormley Stadium in City Park.

The new complex will bring an end to the long habit of coaches idling buses outside the school at the end of each day, ready to sprint to the closest practice field. It was a daily contest for space with other local high school teams.

"What drove it was the fact that a lot of our teams had trouble finding places to practice," DeGruy said.

The stadium deal brought a little luck to Jefferson Parish as well. Parish officials took control of a small piece of the warehouse property for future improvements to the Hoey's Canal. In exchange, Jesuit will get an access road along the canal and pay the parish \$12,535 for the larger piece of land. The **Parish Council** approved the swap in August, and the final paperwork likely will be signed soon, assistant parish attorney Nicole Tomba said.

Ryan Gootee General Contractors, owned by a 1991 Jesuit graduate, is building the complex. It was designed by Mathes Brierre Architects.

Jesuit still has to raise most of the money to complete the project. It has been promised \$2.3 million in pledges from more than 100 alumni and parents, including \$40,000 from a local foundation, DeGruy said.

Having never reveled in playing on its own turf, Jesuit's community has dubbed the new stadium "Home Field Advantage," DeGruy said.

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