

## Bricks and Mortar and More –

### Life Sports Center

by Wayne G. Marty

The theme chosen by Paul Odell, editor of the 1984 Westmar Yearbook, was “Building for a Better Tomorrow.” He introduces the yearbook with “The campus this year has been busy with construction. We have the construction of the Le Mars community swimming pool on the south 40, the construction of a Life-Sports center and Industrial Arts complex adjacent to the Gymnasium, and the renovation of Thoren Hall. With these improvements our campus is on the way to an optimistic future.”

The Gleam of November 20, 1991 reported that the bleachers have been installed in the Life Sports Center and the building can now be considered to be complete. But for this building the major story is “Bricks and Mortar” because “The road of construction of the Lifesports Center was a bumpy one.” A dated chronology may help us follow the “bumpy road.”

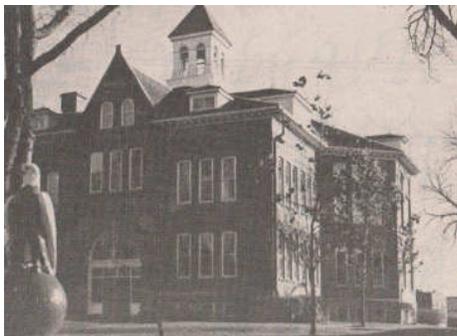
**November 1982** - The project began when the Board of Trustees approved a plan for the expansion of the Westmar Sports Complex.

**September 22, 1983** -The Ground Breaking Ceremony was held with plans to complete Phase I, the ground floor of the Lifesports Center, including locker rooms, a wrestling room, weight rooms, a classroom and some space for Industrial Arts.

**October 3, 1983** -The first major “bump in the road” occurred on a Monday morning when the west wall of the 1941 gym collapsed while excavating for construction of the new Lifesports addition. Classes were in session in the gymnasium when the collapse occurred.

**September 5, 1984** - Good progress on the rebuilding of the west wall and construction of Phase I with the hope that the lower level will be usable by the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester. Director of Maintenance, Freddie Goodchild, says, “I’d like to see the basketball team in there by next fall.” (1985-86 year) This was a good basketball year with Hutchinson, Prescott, Hiemgartner, Starkweather, & others.

Renovated lower floor of Thoren Hall opens for use by the music department.



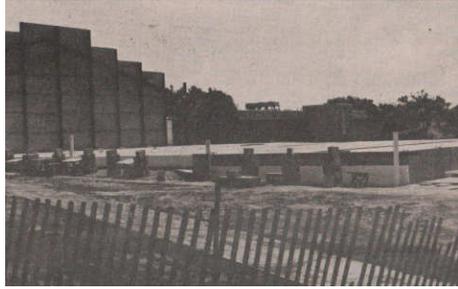
**November 7, 1984** - At the fall Board of Trustees Meeting, Serious financial concerns triggered a motion to “close the college”. The motion failed by a vote of 13 to 4.

**May 9, 1985** – A National Financial Campaign is initiated to acquire funds sufficient for completion of the Lifesports Center by Fall of 1986.

**October 17, 1985** -.A Gleam Editorial describes a sad personified Thoren Hall as it feels its renovation on hold while the focus seems to

be on completion of the Lifesports Center. Actions often reveal priorities.

**October 14, 1986** – Lower Level football locker room, weight room and wrestling room in use. Industrial Arts and Women’s Locker room to be ready by Spring 1987. Upper level completion target date is January 1988.



**November 25, 1987** – Decision to finish racquetball court and thus complete phase I by January 1988.

**October 17, 1990** – Funding from gifts and financing is sufficient (\$732,000) to complete Lifesports Center. Announcement that Thoren Hall will be demolished.



**November 11, 1990** – Thoren Hall demolished on a Sunday morning

**November 14, 1990** - Christmas Festival of Trees was held in the unfinished Lifesports Center.

**November 27, 1990** – Construction begins again with goal to complete the Lifesports Center in time for Commencement of May 1991.

**May 11, 1991** - Commencement ceremonies in Lifesports Center but equipment installation is not complete.

**November 20, 1991** – **LIFESPORTS CENTER COMPLETE!** New bleachers are installed. Inaugural Ceremony was the annual basketball alumni game. The Total cost was stated as \$2,265,000.

“The road of construction of the Lifesports Center was a bumpy one.” It was an eight year process and during the 1990 year Westmar College became Teikyo Westmar University. Many students were recruited and enrolled expecting completion of the building during their years at Westmar. For many, it did not happen. The six years of use until the college closed in November of 1997 continued to be turbulent years. Enrollment increased during the 1991 to 1993 years because of the presence of the Japanese students but then dropped significantly. It always seemed difficult to feel the fan support enthusiasm in the new Lifesports Center. Even a cheering crowd of the same size seemed smaller in the new larger space.

But, thankfully, the use of this new building did not cease with the closing of the college in 1997. It quickly became the facility for the combined programs of the YMCA and the Le Mars Recreational services. One half of the bleachers have been sold so more floor space in the gym is available for the many activities for all ages. In the basement the locker rooms remain as dressing and shower facilities; the Industrial Arts space is now a Weight Room and Flex Room and with the risers removed the Classroom has become the Cardiovascular Room.

So the Teikyo Westmar University Lifesports Center is now owned by the city and is clearly labeled as the Le-Mars Wellness Center with a steady flow of human traffic of all ages from early in the morning to well into the evening with a particularly heavy presence of kids for weekend activities. Perhaps the Bumpy Road has led to a smooth path to healthy living for the citizens of Le Mars.



By Dr. Wayne Marty