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## V3 Sports opens new north Minneapolis aquatics and fitness center this spring

The first phase of V3 Sports' \$97 million aquatics and sports center is opening with a 25-yard pool and fitness

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ANGELINA KATSANIS STAR TRIBLIN

Hero Pascal got excited to jump into the brand new V3 Sports pool in Minneapolis. The 25-yard swimming and training pool will soon be open to the public in Northside Minneapolis, which is the only of its kind in the neighborhood since one

A five-lane, 25-yard swimming pool in north Minneapolis was filled with water this month for the first time, finally bringing to life plans that were years in the making.

"This pool is spectacular," said Malik Rucker, a fifth-generation North Sider and the executive director of V3 Sports, "It doesn't feel real,"

The pool is the centerpiece of V3 Sports' new \$25 million aquatics and fitness center? the first phase for a \$97 million aquatics and sports complex that aims to fill a void of community amenities on the North Side and become a regional destination. The V3 Center also is one of the largest recent projects in north Minnearoils.

"It's really a world-class space," Rucker said. "It's long overdue. We've been underinvested in for so long."

V3 Sports started in 2007 to boost access to swimming for kids of color, but had to use school pools and parks nearby. The new 40,000-square-foot site will open to the public in April or May, with a formal grand opening June 15. Most programming will kick off next fall.

The second phase, which is slated to open in 2027, is nearly four times larger and will feature a <u>50-meter Olympic-sized indoor competition pool</u>? only the third of its type in Minnesota. Community leaders hope the project revitalizes a high-profile corner of Plymouth Avenue N. and Lyndale Avenue, inspiring more economic development in what's long been a disadvantaged area.

"People will see that north Minneapolis has more assets than deficits," said state Sen. <u>Bobby Ioe Champion</u>, who authored a bill that passed last year funding \$15 million for the V3 Center, which is in his Minneapolis district. "It's important for our kids to see the investment being built in our neighborhood and know that we deserve it as well, not just when you go to Medina, Edina or other places like that."

## V3 Sports aquatics center

V3 Sports in Minneapolis is opening a 25-yard teaching pool and fitness facility this spring, with a grand opening June 15. The nonprofit is still fundraising for a second phase featuring a 50-meter Olympic-sized indoor competition pool.



Yuqing Liu, Star Tribune

The options for Minneapolis swimmers shrank after the YWCA Minneapolis closed its longstanding Uptown and downtown pools and fitness centers last fall. Children of color in Minnesota and nationwide face higher drowning rates in part because of the lack of access to pools or swimming lessons.

V3 Center will address those disparities, Rucker said, adding that he hopes it will help North High School start a swim team so students don't have to go to south Minneapolis schools to swim. The facility also will provide much needed fitness space that family members of all ages can use together, from swimming lessons and aquatic fitness classes to treadmills and weights. he said.

Besides the pool and 5,500-square-foot fitness center, the building will have drop-in child care, a hydrotherapy pool, classrooms and space for youth

programs. An initial plan for a modest café has turned into a full-service, 50seat restaurant serving breakfast, lunch and dinner, and providing commercial catering. There's no restaurant on Plymouth Avenue, and the North Side has far more fast food than healthy sit-down restaurants, Rucker said

"You don't have to to go to the North Loop for a nice restaurant," he said about the new Black-owned business that will open in the center. "It's an additional amenity to the North Side. You can't have a healthy community without healthy people."



ANGELINA KAISANIS, STAR TRI

Erika Binger, founding director of V3 sports, laughed with other staff members as they take the first dip into the brand new V3 Sports pool.

## Growing nonprofit

Erika Binger, a former triathlete, founded <u>Y3 Sports</u> to teach kids how to swim and train for triathlons, which lack racial diversity. Binger also is a philanthropist whose great-grandfather, 3M executive William McKnight, started the McKnight Foundation? one of the state's largest private foundations.

V3 Sports bought the three-acre site that housed a former bookbinding warehouse in 2017, but the COVID-19 pandemic delayed construction until late 2022. The project employed many contractors and architects from north Minneapolis and taught a dozen teens and young adults about construction

Once the new two-story building opens, V3 Sports will have grown from an all-volunteer organization working with 50 kids a year to a nonprofit with about 40 employees serving 1,000 people a day.

Now, even after the building opens, the fundraising efforts will continue. V3 Sports has raised \$51 million out of \$126 million in its capital campaign to cover construction and operational costs, Rukeer said. About a quarter of that money is from government sources, with \$15 million in state funding and \$1 million from the city of Minneapolis along with \$800,000 in tax credits:

The remainder of the revenue is coming from private donations and grants.

The largest gift so far is \$6 million from Pat and Gary Sauer and their Sauer Family Foundation in St. Paul.

"We see it as a place for families to come together [and] ... a jewel of the North Side," said Colleen O'Keefe, executive director of the foundation. "This is a way to have a big impact in a community that we care about."

The second phase's three-story facility will have an Italian-made pool that was used for the U.S. Olympic trials in Omaha in 2021 and later transported to Minneapolis. It will have room for 1,000 spectators. The building also will feature an indoor track, outdoor deck, event spaces and four courts to host basketbal games and other events? all overlooking the city skyline.

"Look at the views. It's going to be the coolest courts you'll see," Rucker said.

Once it's complete, the complex will draw 2,000 visitors a day and aims to attract regional and national events.

"It will be an asset for Minnesota and the region," Rucker said. "It's something to be proud of."



Haze Schlaeger dos Santos jumped into his aunt Analyah?s arms as staff members of V3 Sports take their first dip into the brand new pool.

Kelly Smith covers nonprofits/philanthropy for the Star Tribune and is based in Minneapolis. Since 2010, she's covered Greater Minnesota on the state/region team, Hennepin County government, west metro suburban government and west metro K-12 education.

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