

Greater Atlanta Christian School

The Long Forum opened in late January at Greater Atlanta Christian School in Norcross. Reece, Hoopes & Fincher designed the exterior campus spaces, the vehicular drop-off areas and parking, and the pedestrian plazas and walkways. Over the past several years, the school has enhanced the campus experience with new and renovated student gathering areas, plazas, walkways, improved vehicular circulation patterns and drop-offs.

Below is an article that appeared in the Atlanta Journal Constitution:

GAC opens multi-use arena today

By D. Aileen Dodd

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Friday, January 30, 2009

During a time of private school belt-tightening, Greater Atlanta Christian in Norcross is taking a \$17 million leap of faith. Today, the school will open Long Forum, a sports and concert arena, with a ceremony at 10 a.m. The facility is patterned in part after college arenas to meet the needs of the growing k-12 school. It also puts the school in competition with Gwinnett Arena for commercial events such as concerts, conferences and sports tournaments. The forum seats 3,500 people comfortably in a multipurpose space with glossy hardwood floors, large high-definition video screens, concert lighting and professional sound equipment. GAC officials say, however, Long Forum's purpose is not profit-driven.

The arena, the showpiece of the 75-acre campus of collegiate brick buildings and manicured lawns, mainly will be used for school events. It will have chapel services, Spartans' basketball games, film and video classes, Christian concerts, community lectures and occasional tournaments. "We don't expect the building to pay for itself," said GAC President David Fincher. "For us, this is not a business venture, it's an extension of the mission of Greater Atlanta Christian, which includes service to the community."

Before Long Forum was constructed, GAC, a non-profit school, did not have an auditorium large enough to accommodate its 1,950 students. Its basketball team played in a gymnasium that could only fit 1,400 fans. The community is interested. "We have had people tell us they want to do all kinds of things in here," Fincher said. Sometimes the calls come daily — from Christian organizations seeking meeting space, a public safety group looking to host a seminar, a small college hoping to book a spot for a conference tournament. GAC hired a special events planner to field the calls.

School spokeswoman Jill Morris said GAC will wait until next fall to open up the arena to outside rentals. "We are new to the house," Morris said. "We are just trying to figure out where the furniture goes right now." A lineup of events hosted by the school will keep Long Forum busy the next several months: Today, University of Georgia head football coach Mark Richt will speak at the grand opening. On Feb. 17, the Georgia High School Association's Region 6AA boys and girls basketball tournament will start. It runs through Feb. 21. On Feb. 19, former U.N. ambassador Andrew Young will visit, and several metro Atlanta private schools have been invited.

Long Forum was designed to host multiple events, such as a lecture and a basketball tournament on the same day. Designed by Lindsey, Pope, Brayfield & Associates of Atlanta, it has retractable seats and a series of curtains that can transform it to fit the particular events. Officials at the Gwinnett Arena, which seats 13,000 and hosts about 100 events annually, say they welcome another major venue to the county. "I think there are enough things out there that everybody can stay busy," said Julia Karrenbauer, marketing manager at Gwinnett

Center. "It brings more dollars into Gwinnett. I think it's a win-win for everybody." A Gwinnett Arena representative has consulted with GAC officials about event planning.

GAC officials say Long Forum is an investment in the future. Fund-raising began a few years ago during a capital campaign that resulted in \$32 million in contributions used to construct new buildings and update technology. "The seeds of this were birthed in the early 2000s before the current economic environment," Fincher said. "While we have to be concerned about the economy, we have to keep our eyes on our long-term goals."