

No need to stay inside to exercise

Fitness Court to provide free outdoor workout equipment



Fitness Courts are arranged to provide a full-body workout. The National Fitness Campaign

[PREVIOUS IMAGE](#)

Image

[NEXT IMAGE](#)

By Ben Swenson Correspondent

JAMES CITY — Area residents will soon have a new opportunity to stay fit without heading inside a gym.

Work has begun at the Warhill Sports Complex on a Fitness Court, a component of a nationwide initiative by the National Fitness Campaign to combat physical inactivity by providing access to free outdoor exercise equipment. Local planners expect the Fitness Court's ribbon-cutting to be in July.

The Fitness Court is located at the Warhill Sports Complex next to the basketball courts.

The fitness area is the ninth in Virginia and one of more than 500 across the country, according to National Fitness Campaign spokeswoman Lindsay Valenti. The organization has a goal of funding 5,000 Fitness Courts in the United States by 2030.

The courts are arranged to provide a full-body workout by allowing users to cycle through seven categories of exercise: core, squat, push, lunge, pull, agility and bend. A variety of fixed equipment and features, such as lunge steps, pull-up bars and bend stations, will let users work their way through different types of exercises.

The National Fitness Campaign has also developed an app that provides users specific challenges for the space and tailors resources for a range of levels and abilities. There will also be visual instructions on-site for using the equipment.

The total cost for the project is estimated to be \$210,000, according to Carla Brittle, centers and parks administrator for James City County. The Williamsburg Health Foundation provided a grant of \$150,000. The county government's capital improvement programs fund covered \$30,000, and the National Fitness Campaign, which in Virginia is sponsored by insurance firm Aetna, provided \$30,000.

Brittle said that she and other county staffers were enthusiastic about bringing in this Fitness Court because it adds to the variety of outdoor exercise and recreation available to residents. With 50 different components included as part of the structure, there are hundreds of different exercises people can do.

The Warhill Sports Complex is the perfect location for the Fitness Court, according to Brittle, because so many athletes and their families gather there during practices and competitions. Often, parents and other relatives spend time in their vehicles scrolling on their phone while waiting for practice to end. They will soon have another option, Brittle said.

Brittle, the mother of a soccer-playing teenager, has spent countless hours at the sports complex and enjoyed walking trails while her son practiced. She welcomes the variety that the Fitness Court brings.

“This provides fitness options where children exercise and gives adults an opportunity to exercise while their kids are engaged in sports,” she said.

The county’s Parks & Recreation department is looking into occasionally providing instructors on-site and hosting periodic free classes.

Deanna Van Hersh, president and CEO of the Williamsburg Health Foundation, said her organization was eager to support the Fitness Court because it aligned well with her organization’s mission, vision and strategic focus.

“We focus on making the healthy choice the easy choice,” Van Hersh said, noting that the Fitness Court will be free of charge and open to all people regardless of income, age and ability level.

About one-fifth of Greater Williamsburg residents are physically inactive and one-third are obese, health foundation statistics show. The area is also home to a higher proportion of older adults than in Virginia at large.

Providing ready access to healthy choices will help to address some of the region’s health challenges, Van Hersh said. And as an outdoor venue, the Fitness Court will also accommodate those who may be leery of exercising in indoor spaces during seasons when transmission of illness is likely to be high.

“Our board and staff are really excited about this,” Van Hersh said.

Ben Swenson, ben.swenson05@gmail.com