WILKES ROLLS OUT A GREEN CARPET FOR A NEW ERA IN ATHLETICS

By Vicki Mayk

It came on rolls, like the carpet for a giant's living room.

For more than a week in early August, crews labored to install the synthetic turf for the athletic field at the Ralston Athletic Complex. After laying the green surface in wide strips, crews added the finishing touches: white and colored lines, followed by stenciling the numbers. You could almost hear the announcer calling the yard lines, as the numbers appeared: the 40, the 30, the 20. And finally, the yellow and gold “W” logo was placed at the center of it all.

Welcome to a new era in Wilkes athletics.

Renovations began at the athletic complex in May. The synthetic turf is part of a $1.6 million project that includes a field lighting system, new goal posts, a scoreboard and fencing around the perimeter of the field. It transforms the field from a single-sport site to one that will accommodate five intercollegiate sports—football, women’s lacrosse, women’s field hockey and men’s and women’s soccer—and the men’s club lacrosse team. The field also will be used for intramural games and for youth athletic camps offered to the community.

Paul Adams, Wilkes vice president for student affairs, says that the project reflects both the University’s commitment to its athletics programs and the proud history of Wilkes athletics, from the championship teams of the Golden Horde to the present-day Colonels.

“The work at the Ralston Athletic Complex will provide a multi-purpose athletic field for more than 200 of our student-athletes,” says Adams.

Alumnus Bill Hanbury ’72, who played offensive guard from 1968 to 1971 for the Colonels, says the renovations unite past and future generations bound by the tradition of sports.

“On game day, Ralston Field was for me a special place…almost a holy
place…where you could only step on to the field if you had adequately prepared, both physically and mentally, to represent Wilkes football and its extraordinary tradition,” Hanbury says. “Playing on that field, I learned so much about myself and what it takes to be successful: courage, pride, poise and teamwork. I’m so glad the next generation of Wilkes athletes will have an opportunity to perform at this outstanding new facility.”

Wilkes athletics director Adelene Malatesta says other athletics projects are happening in addition to the field renovations. Resurfacing and painting new logos on the Henry Gymnasium floor, resurfacing tennis courts, and work on the softball field were among recent projects. Upgrades at Artillery Park are planned.

“The work benefits 350 student athletes in 16 varsity programs,” Malatesta says. Intramurals add another 450 to that number.

The enhancements to athletics facilities grew out of a strategic plan for athletics completed in 2002. Other developments that have occurred, such as the appointment of a full-time athletic director, the return of men’s and women’s cross country and the construction of the $1 million recreation center in the University Center on Main, also were outlined in that plan.

All of the work reflects a commitment to athletics that is very much a part of the Wilkes tradition.

“To offer a broad-based program in athletics has always been our goal at Wilkes,” Malatesta says.

**DID YOU KNOW…**

- The Wilkes turf is a “green” material in more ways than one: Recycled rubber—primarily ground, used tires, is a component of the turf.
- It takes a crew of six to eight people 10 to 15 days to install the turf.
- The field weighs approximately nine pounds per square foot so the total weight of the field at Wilkes will be approximately 860,000 pounds.
- Five colors are being used as accents on the new field in the logo, yard lines and goal lines. Navy and gold are the Wilkes colors. Football is symbolized in white. Orange pays tribute to Wilkes’ origins as Bucknell University Junior College. A lighter shade of blue also is being used in tribute to Dean George Ralston, who was a graduate of North Carolina.
- The world’s first turf field was installed in 1966. The first “infill” type turf fields, like the one at Wilkes, were installed in 1997.
- The turf is made up of fibers that are 2.5 inches long tufted through a semi-rigid backing. The fibers are tufted in rows that are 3/4 inches apart. The turf is then top dressed with a combination of silica sand and recycled crumb rubber. This fills in the voids between the fibers and causes them to stand up straight. This “infill” also acts as cushioning for the athletes.

**THE NEW VIEW FROM THE HILL**

Wilkes invites all football alumni to cheer on the Colonels at the first home game on Ralston Athletic Complex’s new turf field on Saturday, Sept. 11. Alumni will meet at 11 a.m. at the tent next to Munson Fieldhouse to enjoy lunch, receive a commemorative gift and participate in a pre-game celebration. Tickets to this special event are $10 and guests are welcome. To register or learn more, contact the Office of Alumni Relations at (570) 408-7787 or alumni@wilkes.edu.

Members of the community also are invited to join the University in celebrating the new era for Wilkes athletics by attending the game on this special day. Admission will be free.

Left: A worker readies the giant stencils used to paint numbers on the yard lines. Photos by Earl and Sedor Photographic

Top: A worker uses clippers to cut out green turf so that a colored line can be installed. After the green fibers are cut out, the turf backing is exposed and colored turf is hot glued in its place.

Middle: Workers use a cart mounted sewing machine to sew two panels of turf together.

Bottom: A turf clamp is used by crews to grab the turf securely as they pull out the turf while rolling it out. It also helps pull out wrinkles.