

UW Eau Claire: Groups contribute \$12 million toward sustainability efforts in Sonnentag Event Center, fieldhouse

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(Eau Claire, WI) – Pablo Foundation, the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and its students, the city of Eau Claire and Xcel Energy are investing more than \$12 million to reduce the carbon footprint in the Sonnentag Event Center and John and Carolyn Sonnentag Fieldhouse.

The announcement Thursday of the sustainability features in the facility to be built on the redeveloped brownfield site showcases the power of collaboration that is at the core of UW-Eau Claire's 106-year-old legacy, says Chancellor James Schmidt.

"The city of Eau Claire and Xcel Energy have been steadfast partners and the Pablo Foundation is truly the wind beneath our wings," Schmidt says. "Not only is their generosity powering the building, but it is giving us the courage and determination to continue to work aggressively to reduce our carbon footprint and to build new buildings that will not only serve our students but that will have a role in ensuring a healthy world for future generations."

The Sonnentag Event Center and the John and Carolyn Sonnentag Fieldhouse will be in the County Materials Complex on Menomonie Street that also will include the Mayo Clinic Health System Diagnostic Imaging and Sports Medicine Center. Groundbreaking for the complex will be Monday, April 25.

Pablo Foundation is providing a total of \$9.997 million toward the sustainability efforts with a \$5 million grant, and the remainder of the money given in the form of a low-interest loan to be repaid over several years through energy savings.

The Pablo Foundation funds will be used for geothermal wells, piping, a heat exchanger and pumps, additional electrical capacity, a high-performance glazing system for windows, and additional wall and roof insulation.

Schmidt says Pablo Foundation founders had approached him to inquire about the ways UW-Eau Claire planned to reduce the carbon footprint in the County Materials Complex. Schmidt asked the foundation to “help us find a way to make the Sonnentag project as carbon neutral as possible.”

“Never did I imagine that their ‘help’ would translate into such a significant investment,” Schmidt says of the nearly \$10 million contribution.

Of the contribution, Pablo Foundation’s executive director, MaiVue Xiong adds, “We are honored to be partners in this great project that will have the capacity to bring together those inside and outside our community in ways we’ve never seen before. We are especially honored to support the environmental sustainability infrastructure of the Sonnentag Event Center.

“True to our mission, this project prioritizes our planet, and it is our sincere hope that the carbon-reducing features of the Sonnentag Center will serve as a model, to be replicated again and again in our community, and even across the nation.”

The city of Eau Claire is contributing \$1.5 million toward the project that aligns with the city’s Renewable Energy Action Plan (REAP) addressing how Eau Claire will meet its 100% renewable energy and carbon neutrality commitments by 2050.

UW-Eau Claire students provided \$150,000 to the project last year and the Student Senate is considering a request for an additional \$200,000 to support applications for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification and WELL

Health-Safety Rating (HSR). The WELL HSR consists of features such as ongoing monitoring of air and water quality, managing mold and moisture, and cleaning and sanitization practices.

Xcel Energy says the facility will be the first to participate in a new renewable energy program that will allow it to be powered with up to 100% carbon-free energy through a local solar resource.

In addition, Xcel Energy will assist in developing a pollinator habitat to support bees and butterflies in green spaces and near the utility corridor; donate five solar-powered charging park benches; and partner with the building's architects and engineers to create charging stations for electronic vehicles.

The County Materials Complex will be the largest indoor event venue in northwestern Wisconsin. The 170,500-square-foot off-campus facility will contain a fieldhouse with a capacity of 5,000 people and be home to Blugold men's and women's basketball.

The total cost of the County Materials Complex will be \$100.6 million that includes the \$85.6 million multiuse facility and the \$15 million Mayo Clinic Health System Diagnostic Imaging and Sports Medicine Center.

On April 6, Pablo Group announced plans to build a 128-suite SpringHill Suites by Marriott hotel adjacent to the County Materials Complex. The building, which will be located alongside the complex and the Chippewa River Trail along Menomonie Street, is scheduled to open in 2024.

Pablo Group also plans to build and operate a restaurant with a patio on the banks of the Chippewa River near the County Materials Complex.