Donation will go toward building arena to replace St. John

Donation from Panera franchisee — the single-largest cash gift to the athletic department — will go toward building a 4,000-seat arena that eventually will be home to seven varsity sports

By Encarnacion Pyle
The Columbus Dispatch  Wednesday November 21, 2012 4:20 PM

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Ohio State University will use a $10 million gift from the country's largest owner of Panera restaurants — a huge Buckeye fan — to build a 4,000-seat arena to replace the aging-but-iconic St. John Arena.

OSU leaders will honor Sam Covelli, 59, of Warren, Ohio, and his family at halftime of Saturday's much-anticipated Ohio State-Michigan football matchup for making what they call "one of the most transformational gifts ever" to the university.

It is the single-largest cash gift to Ohio State's athletics department, they said. And it ranks 15th overall in terms of donations to the university as a whole, tied with 11 other $10 million donations.

"They're just good, beautiful people who work hard and are very passionate about the Buckeyes," athletic director Gene Smith said.

Covelli is owner of Covelli Enterprises, which is the largest single franchisees of Panera, with more than 250 restaurants in the United States and Canada, including several in central Ohio. The company is based in Warren and employs more than 20,000 people.

Smith said he hopes Covelli's gift will inspire other donors.

The Covelli Arena will be home to seven varsity sports, including wrestling, volleyball and gymnastics, Smith said. It also will serve as a training facility for men's and women's volleyball, an occasional venue for women's basketball and site of local tournaments and camps.

www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2012/11/21/10-million-for-osu.html
The arena will be built on the corner of Ackerman Road and Fred Taylor Drive. OSU hopes to break ground in late 2014 or early 2015. It is part of a long-range project to expand the school’s athletic district north of Woody Hayes Drive, Smith said.

A master plan created two years ago to determine what Ohio State should look like in 50 years said it would be wise to demolish St. John Arena, which needs $30 million to $40 million in repairs. The proposal calls for replacing St. John with new sports facilities and using the land along Lane Avenue for classrooms and student housing.

St. John opened in 1956. Built for slightly less than $4 million — $34 million in today’s dollars — it was considered state of the art, with its more than 13,000 chairback seats, four-sided spectator array with unobstructed views, soaring ceiling and gleaming silver four-barrel roof.

For years, fans have been trying to prevent demolition of the building, saying it is full of wonderful memories. Most notably, it helped Ohio State attract the basketball team that won the 1960 national championship, the only NCAA basketball title in school history.

But time has taken a toll on the arena, OSU officials said. It has roof problems and needs extensive repairs to its electrical, plumbing and heating and ventilation systems, they said. Upgrades also are needed to make the building more handicapped accessible and to improve the overall fan experience.

“It’s old and is not in use that much anymore,” athletics spokesman Dan Wollenberg said.

Smith said there’s no date set for demolishing St. John, especially because there are still questions about what to do with French Field House and the OSU Ice Rink that are on either side of it.

“St. John gave us so many memories and experiences, and we’ll never lose those,” Smith said.

OSU officials said Covelli supports a lot of charitable work and is founder of Step Up for Stefanie, a 5K run and 2-mile walk to benefit the Stefanie Spielman Fund for Breast Cancer Research. The event has raised $325,000 since it started two years ago.

Covelli said he and his wife, Cury, have always been big Buckeyes fans, and their love for Ohio State only grew when their now 23-year-old son, Albert, started classes there.

Albert graduated in June with a business degree and works at the family business, helping to run the Columbus restaurants. Sam Covelli opened the largest Panera in the nation a year ago on Lane Avenue, across from Ohio State.

Covelli hopes 18-year-old daughter Danielle will follow in her big brother’s footsteps.

“We could only be so lucky,” he said.

Covelli made news in September when he agreed to pay more than $76,000 to settle discrimination claims by current and former black Panera employees in Pennsylvania. The workers said Covelli denied them promotions and made them work in the kitchen because he didn’t want them in areas where the public was served. In the settlement, Covelli denied any wrongdoing and pledged not to discriminate in the future.

OSU spokeswoman Amy Murray said university officials knew about the settlement, and “we remain confident in our relationship with the Covelli family.”
before Panera, Coven was the single-largest franchisee in muffins, with 43 restaurants. In 1997, he sold those to try his hand with Panera. He also owns several O'Charley's restaurants.

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The Covelli Arena

- The 4,000 seat arena will serve as home to seven varsity sports volleyball, gymnastics, fencing and wrestling. In addition, it will serve as the occasional venue for women's basketball as well as serving as the host site for local tournaments and camps.

- This state-of-the-art facility allows for the greatest flexibility in the use of space by accommodating various configurations specifically designed for each competition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Seats</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fencing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
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<td>3,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>4,000</td>
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- The arena will serve as the training facility for Men's and Women's Volleyball. Coaches and teams will benefit from up-to-date locker rooms, offices, training and treatment rooms all critical to the recruitment of our student athletes.

- Included within the arena on the concourse level is the public space which includes administrative offices, arena box office, concession area and catering space. The arena also serves as the meeting place for the over 13,000 campers who participate in our programs each year.

Need for Multi Sport Arena

Built in 1956, St. John Arena is the former home of our men's and women's basketball teams. The opening of the Jerome Schottenstein Center in 1988 allowed the volleyball, gymnastics, fencing and wrestling teams to call St. John Arena home. While considered a state-of-the-art facility at the time of its construction, it has become both a financial drain on the University as well as an inferior venue for some of our most prestigious teams to hold their contests – including our 2011 men's volleyball national championship team and the 2012 national championship in fencing.

Practice and competitive facilities are important evidence of an institution's commitment to excellence; prospective student-athletes and their parents earnestly compare them. To remain competitive at the national level, a modern facility is needed for Ohio State student-athletes.

Since St. John Arena [pictured on this page] was designed and built over 50 years ago, the standards of competition have changed considerably. So too has the use of technology in coaching and teaching. Currently, coaches and staff do not have access to up-to-date video equipment and technology that is used by their competitors. New secure space and state-of-the-art equipment will greatly enhance both recruiting and scouting – two essential functions of winning programs.

With the growing excellence of Ohio State Athletics, more of our student-athletes – both men and women – are competing on the national and international stage, including the 2012 Olympics. A modern facility will continue to fuel the great Buckeye tradition of success both in and out of the classroom.
Elements of Covelli Arena
Concourse
Event Floor
Concession Areas
Men's Volleyball Locker Room
Women's Volleyball Locker Room
Coaches Locker Rooms
Visitor Locker Rooms
Athletic Training Room
Treatment Room
Office
Seats
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Plan for new Ohio State sports complex will mean razing some of Buckeye Village

Ohio State University officials have suggested that Buckeye Village, an apartment complex for graduate students with families that opened in 1948, eventually will be replaced.

By Mary Mogan Edwards
The Columbus Dispatch • Tuesday November 8, 2016 5:56 AM

Plans for a new sports facility at Ohio State University call for demolition of a chunk of the Buckeye Village housing complex for married students. That came as a surprise to residents, who learned last week that they'll be living next to a construction site starting in June — if they even have a place.

University planners sent residents an email about the plan on Oct. 28 — one week before OSU trustees were to vote on it.

Trustees voted on Friday to spend $49.7 million to design and build the Covelli Multi-Sport Arena. It will mean tearing down six Buckeye Village units totaling 50 apartments, or 18 percent of the complex, which is on Ackerman Road near Olentangy River Road. University officials said they expect that, if they don't take in any new residents next year, the normal amount of attrition would leave enough apartments. They also said they will work to minimize disruption from construction, and that they'll let residents out of leases early if they want to find another place to live.

But Hannah Sayre, a doctoral candidate in chemistry who lives in Buckeye Village with her husband and two young children, doubts there will be enough units large enough for families.

"There is already a waiting list for the two-bedroom apartments, and several of the displaced families have young children," she said.

Gabriel Mordoch, a graduate teaching assistant in Portuguese, fears that living amid construction won't be safe for his 4-year-old.

University officials met with Buckeye Village residents at their community center on Wednesday night, but Sayre and Mordoch said their concerns weren't allayed. "As usual, they send some people who really aren't involved in decision-making, who just explain what's going to happen," Sayre said.
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planning, sat down with them behind closed doors after a public committee meeting. University officials say the placement of the Covelli arena is part of a long-term plan to consolidate major athletics buildings into one area.

They've also suggested that Buckeye Village, which dates to 1948 and recently was found to have high lead levels in the plumbing in some apartments, eventually will be replaced. "As part of the university's evolving Framework 2.0 plan, we continue to consider possible options for future graduate and family housing," spokesman Chris Davey said. "We are committed to working with the Council of Graduate Students and residents to gather feedback from students about their needs."

But Buckeye Villagers want the university to move faster on that front, said Cesar Lopes-Gemelli, a graduate fellow in Portuguese. Some current Buckeye Village residents already took part in future-housing discussions in 2014, and, "They're frustrated that they're starting over from the very beginning," Sayre said. "The sentiment seemed to be, construction is already beginning for the athletic facility, and we're starting over with pre-planning for the family housing."

Buckeye Village residents value the place for reasons both practical and emotional. Mordoch noted that the university is flexible with leases when they don't match up with academic terms, and he likes that the complex is within walking distance of classes and is served by the campus bus system. He also appreciates that many of the residents have children and, like him, are international students. He is from Brazil.

"It's a very special community," Sayre said. "There's a lot of support amongst the neighbors. It's not easy being a grad student and having children. We all understand that and are able to help each other out."

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