

A NEW DAY AT THE WOODS

SMWC ATHLETICS REACHES NEW PLATEAU
WITH FOOTBALL FIELD'S UNVEILING



Tribune-Star/Joseph C. Garza

Those in attendance applaud after Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College President Brennan J. Randolph (with scissors) and Sister of Providence Dawn Tomaszewski, right, cut the ribbon for the new McMahon Field on Thursday on the SMWC campus. The multi-purpose football and soccer field is named for donors Anita McMahon, class of 1961, and Michael McMahon. It is the final phase of the READI-funded campus projects.

BY MARK BENNETT
TRIBUNE-STAR

With a hundred yards-plus of rich, manicured grass stretched out behind her, Marcia Schmidt described the athletic pursuits available to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College students in the late 1960s and early '70s.

Sports offerings then were mostly recreational — badminton, tennis, some basketball.

"Nothing like it is now," Schmidt, a 1972 Woods grad, said during Thursday afternoon's gathering of nearly 100 people at the college's outdoor athletic fields.

Indeed, the group of SMWC staff, students, public and civic officials, donors and parents assembled for the dedication of McMahon Field.

The all-purpose facility for football and soccer is the final piece of campus projects initiated through a \$1.5-million Regional Economic Acceleration and Development grant,



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Marcia Schmidt, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College Class of 1972, talks about supporting the college throughout the years during a ribbon cutting ceremony for the college's new football and soccer field, McMahon Field, on Thursday on the SMWC campus. The press box at the new field will be called Schmidt press box thanks to a donation from Marcia and husband, Jerry.

and supported by donors such as Schmidt and her husband, Jerry.

The Schmidts donated funds for the McMahon Field press box, and the field itself is named for donors Michael McMahon and his mother

Anita, a 1961 Woods grad.

The field will get broken-in soon. Its first Pomeroy men's soccer game is Aug. 21, followed by a women's game on Sept. 1.

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Then, the school's first home football game in its 186-year history is scheduled for 1 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 26 when SWMC plays the University of St. Francis.

That game will also be the school's first full-fledged football contest as SMWC transitions from four years of sprint football (for players 190 pounds or lighter) to National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics-level competition. Without their own home field, the Pomeroy sprint football teams had to play their games at nearby West Vigo High School.

And then in the spring of 2027, the new Pomeroy women's flag football team begins play there. That news also was announced at Thursday's ceremony, and Lane Sluder — who played for SMWC's previous sprint football program — was introduced as the first Pomeroy flag football head coach.

"These are exciting announcements," said SMWC President Brennan Randolph said.

SMWC's grant was one of 23 projects funded through \$20 million in READI funds awarded to the Wabash Valley Regional Development Authority in 2022. The Indiana Economic Development Corporation distributed the READI funds, which came through the federal American Rescue Plan Act.

Since its awarding, the Woods' \$15-million portion already helped enhance other Pomeroy athletic facilities, such as basketball and pickleball courts behind Le Fer Hall and updated equine arenas.

Representatives from grant-funding entities, and others at the state, regional and local levels joined the Woods community at Thursday's event, where only the July heat matched the excitement level in intensity.

Several speakers repeated the expectation that the athletic and equine programs enhanced by the college's grant will boost the number of student-athletes at the school and visitors attending their sporting events. That



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Michael McMahon displays an artist's rendering of the new Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College football field named after Anita McMahon, class of 1961, and Michael himself after its dedication ceremony on Thursday on the SMWC campus.



Tribune-Star/Joseph C. Garza

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College President Brennan J. Randolph talks about McMahon Field that will be built on the college's campus during a ribbon cutting ceremony for it on Thursday at SMWC.

equals an economic jolt, too, they said.

"The work done at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College is going to impact west-central Indiana," said Josh Alsip, vice president of regional development for the West Central Indiana Partnership, a regional development group representing Vigo, Clay, Parke, Sullivan and Vermillion counties.

Beyond such tangential effects, the on-the-turf impact of the program having its own home field makes Pomeroy's coach Blaine Powell smile.

Powell has coached SMWC football since its sprint-format program debuted in 2022, losing only a handful of games

in four years and winning a Midwest Sprint Football League title in that stretch.

Powell earned his bachelor's degree at The Woods while coaching and is now building a fledgling NAIA football program. His 2026 roster features 120 players, nearly 50 more than its largest number in the sprint era.

On Thursday, he thanked West Vigo and the Vigo County School Corporation for the arrangement that allowed his teams to compete at Jay Barrett Field. That said, Powell is anxious to play on a true SMWC home field.

"Logistically, it makes a lot of things easier on us," Powell said, surrounded by several players from this fall's squad.

"We don't have to haul players and equipment back and forth. And it's our home field."

One of those players, Terre Haute native Treva Branch-Lewis, was a defensive back on last season's Woods sprint team and will play against the NAIA competition for the Pomeroy this fall and beyond. He looked across new McMahon Field, well manicured but still stark with only two sets of bleachers alongside it, and talked about bigger things ahead there, very soon.

"The goal this season is to win a NAIA championship," Branch-Lewis said.

As for facility goals, SMWC Athletic Director Kevin Lanke said visions for the next three to five years aren't yet specific. Eventually, the field may add artificial turf, if that's practical; additional seating and further upgraded lockerroom, training and concessions structures, Lanke said.

For now, pre-2026 season preparations will include adding a third set of bleachers, completing the Schmidt Press Box and erecting a scoreboard.

"This is very much Phase I of the project," Lanke said, "but a very exciting Phase I."

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