March 24, 2014

Countdown to Riverside City College's 100th Anniversary

2014 will mark the 60th anniversary of the opening and dedication of the Riverside College Gymnasium located on Saunders Street. It was later called the Women’s Gymnasium and today is known as the Catharine S. Huntley Gymnasium. The 1950s saw many construction projects started and completed on the campus as the post-World War II influx of students increased the number of college undergraduates. In those years Riverside City College (then known as Riverside College) was located across Terracina Avenue from Riverside Polytechnic High School. Wheelock Gymnasium (built in 1928) was shared by the two institutions. When state construction funds became available, it was decided to build an additional gym for the exclusive use of RC. The September 9, 1953 issue of the “Tiger Times” student newspaper previewed the new gym to the college community. The article read:

“Completion of the new College gymnasium this year will at last make it possible for RC to offer a full physical education program on the college level, reports Glenn Gilkeson, director of athletics. Located on Lovekin Field, the new building will contain a full size basketball court which can be marked off in cross-floor basketball and badminton courts and a general purpose room suitable for modern dance, corrective exercises, social dancing and recreational games, or the showing of movies. Shower and rest room facilities both for men and women are so planned that they can be available without opening the rest of the building. Outside facilities will include tennis courts, handball courts and a practice field to be located on the site of the old eucalyptus grove. Availability of these new facilities will enable the College to extend its program of training in activities with a carry-over value in adult life, Gilkeson said. At the present time, the college is sharing with Poly’s 2500 students a physical plant designed to accommodate a high school population of approximately 1800, Gilkeson, who is also director of athletics for the high school, pointed out.”

Below is the photo that accompanied the article.

The construction photo beneath was taken in January 1954 and appeared in that year’s “Tequesquite” yearbook.
The June 10, 1954 “Tiger Times” newspaper ran the photo below. The caption read:

“MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL – Pretty Sherry Gilbert tries out some of the dressing room facilities in the new physical education building. The gymnasium is nearly complete and it will be all ready for use when students begin classes next fall.”

The gym was indeed, completed in time for use in the beginning of the 1954 fall semester but was not dedicated until November 17th. An article, announcing the dedication, appeared in the November 10, 1954 “Tiger Times”. In part it read:

“Formal dedication of the new college gymnasium will be held at 11 a.m., Wednesday November 17 on the main gym floor. Bruce Miller, Superintendent of Riverside City Schools, will preside over the ceremonies, with Board of Education president Lewis P. Alabaster, other board members and student body officials attending. ‘The public is invited to join with college students at the dedicatory program,’ President Noble said, ‘but seating will be limited.’ ‘For many years,’ Noble added, ‘the college and high school have used combined facilities, this, with the continued growth of both institutions, have hampered offering of an adequate physical education program. This year, with new facilities, the college has embarked on an extended program of physical education – one unique in college circles.’ The gymnasium, of rigid steel frame and reinforced brick construction, was built at a cost of $335,000. The principal floor is 75 by 106 feet, with shower and locker rooms for men adjacent to one end and for women at the other. In addition there are squad rooms, therapy, first aid, counseling and office areas for the staff. The building faces the college play fields which now include a football field, a quarter mile track, six tennis courts, basketball and volleyball courts, and six out-of-doors handball courts.”
The photo that accompanied the article appears beneath along with a recent photo of the dedication plaque. The plaque reads that the gym was “ERECTED 1953” but in fact the gym was not completed and in use until 1954.

In the 1955 yearbook the gym was described as:

“NEAREST ADDITION to the college plant is large and attractive gymnasium that opened in September. Construction project included placement of five tennis courts, handball courts and other facilities as shown in these photographs. The new center is divided by Saunders Street in the Tequesquite Arroyo also-the neighborhood of the electronics and auto mechanics shops. With the new college gymnasium completed this year, opportunities in physical education have widely expanded. Men and women alternately share the practice floor for badminton and basketball, while the special room for modern dance is always filled with exotic music and women in black. The new gymnasium is more than just another building many-minutes-away. It has broadened the opportunities available to every student on campus. Among the new courses made possible for women are pom-pom and self-defense. Fencing, also a new class, provides the thrill of a novel experience as well as grace and balance.

The photos underneath, all appeared in the 1955 yearbook.
In the 1980s the gym was dedicated to Catherine S. Huntley who taught Physical Education at RCC from 1926 to 1962 (There will be a future “Countdown” on her career at the college).

The next photo shows the Catharine Huntley Gymnasium, as it appears today.
It is 1 year and 50 weeks until RCC’s 100th Anniversary on March 13, 2016.

The Riverside City College Instructional Media Center is bringing you this five year countdown to RCC’s 100th Anniversary. Our intention is to give everyone a weekly glance at the many people and events that have been a part of the college.

Our thanks go to the RCC Digital Library Archives and the District’s Office of Strategic Communications and Relations for allowing us to use their photo and newspaper collections. Thanks as well to all of the RCC students and Faculty Advisors that were a part of the yearbook and newspaper staffs. Thanks also to Tom Johnson and Gilbert Jimenez who wrote “the book” about RCC’s history. “Riverside City College 1916-1981- A 65 Year History” is available in the RCC Digital Library.

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