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Eric F. Spina
University of Dayton, efspina@udayton.edu

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Fresh Look, Same Soul

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By Eric F. Spina

Zig zagging around beams and steering well clear of the spraying sparks of a welder's torch, I recently embarked on a behind-the-scenes tour of the remarkable transformation of the University of Dayton Arena.

As nearly 200 construction workers scurried about, the Arena bustled with purpose. In three short months, the basketball season will open with much of phase two of the \$72 million modernization completed. I predict fans will be awed by the improvements.

The arena promises to be lighter, brighter — and just as roaring loud. “We’re not messing with the soul of the bowl,” says Scott DeBolt, senior associate director of athletics and director of UD Arena, repeating a phrase he’s been told by longtime season ticketholders who cherish the facility’s ambiance and calling card as host of more NCAA basketball tournament games than any other venue anywhere.

As I gazed at daylight streaming through a newly expanded Eastern side, I caught a glimpse of the future for the iconic Arena, which will usher in its 50th birthday in 2019 with a bold, fresh makeover — and some well-deserved swagger.

Before the first tip-off this fall, the original seats in the 300 and 400 levels of the East side of the Arena will be replaced by new seats (yes, these will also have cupholders!). Restrooms on the North and East sides will be completely renovated. As fans walk into what will be the stunning lobby of a new Southeast entrance, they’ll be able to visit a more visible box office and, by January, a team store, both equipped with large television screens, so not a moment of action is missed.

With one additional phase of construction still to go, during the next year basketball fans and families attending graduation will be treated to a combination of the retro and the modern. “It will be like walking through a time warp,” Scott quipped.

For instance, the concourse on the East side will be dramatically expanded this year, with the addition of 126 club seats and, eventually, a private lounge for premium ticketholders. The same improvements are slated for the West side next summer. Eventually, gigantic graphics of storied moments in Dayton Flyer history will wind throughout the entire building.

Beth Keyes, who is assisting Scott oversee the largest, most complex project in UD history as the facilities project manager, points out that the new concourses, when fully completed in 2019, will improve circulation and ease congestion at half time and at the end of games and graduation ceremonies.

Beth, Scott, and scores of workers are treating this transformation with professionalism, pride, practicality — and a single focus.

The University of Dayton Arena will sport a brand-new look for a new generation of fans, but just like the passion of the Flyer Faithful, its soul will never change.