

# Norwalk's new place to play --year round

NORWALK

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There will never be a rainout at Norwalk's newest sports complex.

SoNo Field House, a 56,000-square-foot structure featuring a massive artificial turf field, ropes course, and climbing wall, opened for business in late October at 365 Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. An invitation-only celebration on Saturday will officially mark the grand opening.

"It was a lot of hard work and long hours we put in," Jim Quinn, owner, said. "It feels great to be open, but now the focus is on operations and keeping things moving smoothly. We felt Norwalk is very centrally located within Fairfield County and this was the perfect spot for this."

With the dividers up, the turf field is marked as regulation-sized soccer and lacrosse fields. With the dividers down, there are three separate smaller fields for soccer, lacrosse, field hockey, flag football and other sports. The field is surrounded by a unique netting system to allow spectators an up-close and safe view.

Above the fields is a complex ropes course, which is used as a corporate team-building exercise. The rock wall, which climbs 28 feet to the ceiling and features various degrees of difficulty, is also used for team-building.

One of the upstairs rooms overlooking the expanse of the main level offers a close-up view of the rock wall. Panza said the room can be used for team-building as they watch and encourage their co-workers as they climb the wall.

Looking out over the expansive interior of the SoNo Fieldhouse this week, Quinn marveled at the possibilities.

"You can have a lot of things going on at once here. There's a lot of buzz," he said. "It's a very functional space. When you think about it, the sky's the limit."

There is also a DJ booth and sound systems for birthday parties. There are two meeting rooms on the upper level that may be used for corporate meetings, team-building exercises or parents to watch the action on the field below.

The overhead fluorescent lighting system is zoned so that only lights that are needed for a specific activity are on. The fieldhouse also features windows running along the top of the walls to allow in natural sunlight. It is one of many green initiatives in place at SoNo Field House.

The turf field includes an in-fill -- called "eco-fill" -- made of recycled rubber, but not from tires. Health concerns have been raised because of the carcinogens released by recycled rubber tires.

According to Tony Panza, an architect with J.G. Rogers Architects, which designed the building, there are several other green initiatives within the building, such as low-flow plumbing, white roof for reflecting heat, and the high insulation of the steel structure.

SoNo Field House was also built on a former brownfield site. Panza said a concrete building was torn down to make way for the structure. Much of that building, he said, was used for the fieldhouse's foundation, which minimized waste and saved money.

"We reclaimed as much of that structure as possible," Panza said.

Quinn added: "All our cleaning products are green and we have an extensive recycling program. All these green aspects are very important to us. I think you have an obligation today to approach business that way."

Quinn, who also owns properties in downtown South Norwalk, is involving the community with the project through his charity, Students of the World Care. Every Wednesday at 4 p.m. the fieldhouse has complimentary lacrosse clinic to inner city youths of Norwalk.

"It's a great way to get involved with the community," he said. "We want to give a sports experience to families and children in need."