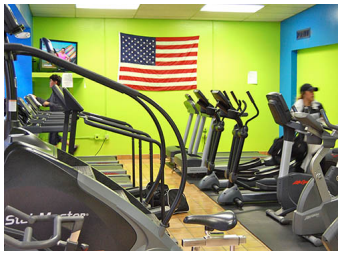
Gallup Fitness Center renamed to honor late councilor

Written by By Chrissy Largo Sun Correspondent
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The Gallup Fitness Center will soon have a different name called the “Cecil Garcia Fitness Center” by the end of this month. The new name will be in memory of former City Councilor Cecil Garcia and his total life commitment to physical fitness.

The idea for the name change was pitched to the Gallup City Council on Nov.10, by two close friends of Garcia’s, Joe Milosevich, owner of Joe Milo’s White Water Trading Co., and former Mayor, John Pena. It was approved unanimously with a vote of 5-0.

Garcia has been described as an avid fitness guru by all that knew him, including longtime friend, Milosevich. He knew Garcia since he was in junior high and after high school, they both got married, lost touch, but were reunited one day as they were both working out at the fitness center in Gallup. They would continue to be workout partners for the next 15 years.

“He was always, even in high school and college, always conscious of his health,” Milosevich said. “He took good care of himself throughout his whole lifetime.”

As workout partners, their usual workout times were Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. After their workout, they would eat lunch together and talk about current events.

“He was here every day at the same time,” DJ Estrada said. Estrada has been working at the Gallup Fitness Center for three years as a recreation coordinator.

“He always used to come in here about 1-1:30 pm. Him and Joe Milo. That was his workout partner. They would sit here on the bikes and talk about sports and daily things. They would go on the bikes for 30 to 40 minutes and go into the weight room.”

Among other work projects, Garcia was known to be instrumental during his tenure as city councilor in getting the right people to operate the fitness center, but he also helped with getting the place cleaned up and adding new equipment to the facility.

“It was a huge push by Cecil in making improvements at the fitness center because we had struggled for quite some time, in terms of it costing the city a lot of money to run,” Allan Landavazo, current City Councilor for District 2 and a close friend of Garcia’s said. “I think based on membership, and the fees collected, the center basically pays for itself today.”

On average, the fitness center has approximately between 250-300 people that sign in on a daily basis and that number continues to climb. While most fitness centers are closed during all major holidays, the Gallup Fitness Center is closed only on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter, another effort that was pushed by Garcia.

“Go down there at 4:30 pm every day and you are lucky to find a parking place,” Milosevich said.

The Gallup Fitness Center was once privately owned and was eventually bought out by Gurley Motor Company. In 2002, the Gurley family decided to donate all the land including the fitness center to the City of Gallup.

Pena, a good friend to Garcia, was mayor at the time of the donation and he said he was waiting on someone that he considered worthy of naming the fitness center after. Since he knew Garcia was a long-time member and fitness fanatic, he said that was the reason why he supported to have the fitness center renamed after Garcia.

“He [Garcia] always talked about quality of life,” Pena said. “I think that the fitness center is the number one ‘quality of life’ operation that the city has, period.”

If Garcia would have been reelected, his goal was to expand the fitness center so that the machines were spaced out nicely, and he wanted to add a juice bar, Milosevich said, adding that Garcia just wanted a nice fitness center for Gallup.

Plans are underway to purchase a sign, and it will most likely be paid for out of city coffers.

“It should be very cost efficient,” Landavazo said.

Currently, there is a small sign that sits by the front door entrance.

“Cecil was always a very positive person. Even at the gym, he would talk to everybody, young or old, and he’d tell them to take care of their health,” Milosevich said. “That was just the type of guy he was.”

Cecil E. Garcia, former Gallup City Councilor for District 4, passed away on Oct. 19 from a blood disorder. He was born on Feb. 6, 1950 in Grants, NM.