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OLYMPIC PROPORTIONS

GULLIVER PREPARATORY SCHOOL OPENS THE ONLY OLYMPIC-SIZED SWIMMING POOL ON A MIAMI-DADE HIGH SCHOOL CAMPUS

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For the "Wow" factor, look no further than Gulliver Preparatory in Pinecrest.

The school boasts a new 50-meter, Olympic-sized pool with 10 lanes and seats for 300 spectators. It also has a second-floor viewing platform, two locker rooms (one for the home team, the other for, *sniff*, the other side), a workout and training room and coaches' offices.

Total cost: \$4.5 million.

"It's cutting edge and fantastic, I'm very impressed," said Tori Hames-Picciochi, 45, a member of Gulliver's swim team from 1977 to 1981, who held several enduring school records in the 200-yard individual medley and 100-yard butterfly.

In those days of the Jimmy Carter administration — and up until this week — the Gulliver swim team had to make do by training in a six-lane, 25-yard pool on Gulliver's Academy campus on Old Cutler Road. The school's water polo team had to rent practice space elsewhere because the pool wasn't deep enough.

The Gulliver Schools Aquatic Center's new pool, designed by Miami-based Gili-McGraw Architects, meets international standards with a depth of nine feet in the middle and just under seven feet at the edges. The deeper the pool, the faster it is for competition.

"It's monumental," said current state champ Trevor Reitz, 18, a Gulliver senior swimmer and water polo star who recently won the Class 1A title in the 100-yard butterfly with an All-American time of 49.93.

"I live in West Palm Beach and commute every day and a lot of times have trouble getting transportation for practices," he said. "Just having a pool on cam-



ALLISON DIAZ/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

SUPER-SIZED: From left, swim coach James Sweeney and Gulliver's head John Krutulis, show off the new Olympic-sized pool with seating for 300 spectators, a second-floor viewing platform, locker rooms, a training room and coaches' offices.

pus is amazing; having a world-class pool means the world to me and the school."

The facility would be the envy of almost any school because with this acquisition — paid for by the Gintel Family Foundation, the Sesana family and other supporters — Gulliver becomes the only school in Miami-Dade to boast an on-site 50-meter Olympic-sized pool.

Colleges such as the University of Miami, Miami Dade College, Florida International University and Florida Atlantic University, have 50-meter pools.

So do a few cities, including Tamiami, Miami Springs, Hialeah, Coral Springs and Fort Lauderdale. Among high schools,

Pine Crest High School in Fort Lauderdale has a 50-meter, eight-lane pool.

A handful of schools in Miami-Dade have 25-yard pools such as Westminster Christian in Palmetto Bay, Ransom Everglades in Coconut Grove and MAST Academy in Key Biscayne. None are suitable for international competitions.

And the Gulliver Aquatic Center sports Omega starting blocks — with an adjustable slanted backstop for track starts and wired to detect false starts on relays.

Only one other U.S. facility — in Federal Way, Wash. — has them. They bought the Omega blocks for a USA Swimming

Nationals meet. The blocks debuted last year at the World Championships in Rome, but arrived too late to win approval from FINA for use during last summer's Olympic Games.

The new pool and its state-of-the-art equipment thrill both swimmers and coaches.

"It's just unbelievable," said James Sweeney, Gulliver's Aquatic Center director who is in his second season as head swim coach. "It's going to be incredible for both the swimming and water polo programs of not just having a 50-meter pool but a deep pool throughout. It makes swimming faster."

Sweeney said Gulliver plans to make the pool available to the

community for Masters swimming sessions, age-group teams and local, national and international meets. The school teams, as well as the Masters ages 19 and older, are expected to begin practicing Monday.

The ribbon-cutting on Friday has already had ripple effects in the community.

Ransom-Everglades, another swimming powerhouse in Miami-Dade, plans to follow Gulliver, said Ransom Head of School Ellen Mocerri.

"We are certainly considering doing that. We have a 25-yard pool that's been around quite some time, about 37 years. It's a great pool and an extremely competitive pool, but it's also old and at some point we have to replenish those facilities," Mocerri said.

The reason so few pools of any magnitude exist in South Florida schools is that they are expensive to operate.

"Let's face it, education is not the most highly funded activity in Florida," Mocerri said.

But having an on-campus pool, where faculty and students can cheer for swimmers and water polo teams "is a great motivator" Reitz said.

It "helps for the relationships" between students and faculty "to understand what swimmers go through," Sweeney agreed.

Few people "realize they [swimmers] are putting in four to five hours a day and then having meets on the weekend, too," Sweeney added. "It's a lot of fun and it's a great sport but it's very disciplined and most swimmers are very good in the classroom, too, and that's what we want."

For more information on the Masters or Gulliver Swim Club age-group program, call Coach Sweeney at 305-666-7937, extension 3816.