

Parents Donate Pool to School

Carmel High's new pool substantially larger than 'inadequate' old one

By LAITH AGHA - Herald Staff Writer

Breaking ground was the easy part. Securing funds for a new swimming pool and finding one that could accommodate the growing demand for a state-of-the-art facility posed the real challenges for the Carmel Unified School District.

A \$21.5 million school bond that passed in November enabled the renovation or replacement of several Carmel High School facilities, including the swimming pool. But that didn't solve the question of where to find a suitable pool.

That is where Mike and Dia Rianda came in.

The parents of three aquatically inclined sons bought the world-class pool from the Indiana Sports Corporation used in the organization's 2004 FINA World Swimming Championship, and donated it to the school district.

The pool was used for three weeks before being dismantled and placed in storage, Mike Rianda said.

The Riandas and some of the pool project's other key figures gathered Wednesday morning to say goodbye to the last corner of the school's old swimming pool before an excavator pile drove it into the rest of the rubble.

"For the district and for the high school, it's fantastic," said superintendent Marvin Biasotti. "It's something a number of groups of people have been dreaming about for 10 to 15 years. There's been lots of interest for a long time to really (improve) what has been a shortcoming of our school district, which is a pool that really has been inadequate."

Built in 1943, the old pool was four feet at its deepest. The new pool, which is sitting dismantled in a warehouse in Indiana, will be 13 or 14 feet deep, said Dan Paul, the school district's operations manager. Its surface area will be 25 feet by 40 feet.

Between the \$3.4 million allocated in the bond and the Riandas' donation, most of the pool project's expenses are covered. However, Friends of Carmel Aquatics -- the parent group that instigated the drive for a new pool several

years ago -- is trying to raise another \$170,000 to purchase diving boards, scoreboards, lane lines and other accessories.

To raise funds, the group is selling tiles -- ranging from \$300 to \$2,500 -- that will adorn the pool. Buyers can have their names and/or messages engraved on the tiles.

The group has been instrumental in instigating the pool project, said Biasotti.

"The light bulb went on when we were at Cabrillo College," said Merrie Potter, a founder of Friends of Carmel Aquatics and a physical education teacher at Captain Cooper School in Big Sur. "We were in this great deep water pool and our kids could not compete. I looked at this pool and thought, 'This is our inspiration. We can do this. What do we need to make this happen?'"

Potter and Meredith Manhard, who have both had children pass through the Carmel school system, rallied other parents to join the push for a new pool. The Riandas' oldest son, Kameron, swims for Arizona State University. They have two sons who compete in swimming and water polo at Carmel High -- Jake, a senior, and Travis, a junior.

In addition to the pool, the high school will have a new library and an expanded gymnasium. The district's three elementary schools -- Carmel River, Tularcitos and Captain Cooper -- are all receiving some form of upgrades, and the middle school received \$400,000 for The Hilton Bialek Biological Sciences Habita, its outdoor education program.