

Dirt, disco and a day New Albany savors

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— In a tent filled with balloons, speeches and revelers spelling “YMCA” with their arms, only the six shiny shovels stuck in a pile of dirt signaled that you weren’t at a wedding reception.

Nearly 200 people celebrated the groundbreaking Monday for Scribner Place, a multiuse New Albany complex set to open in 2008.

With bulldozing well under way, project leaders shoveled soil off the State Street pavement after brief remarks from several of them.

“This is an example of community at its very best,” said Pat Howard, executive director of LifeSpan Resources Inc. LifeSpan’ and Floyd Memorial Hospital and Health Services’ offices will join a swimming pool and YMCA fitness center in Scribner Place, which is co-owned by the YMCA of Southern Indiana and New Albany’s government.

The Caesars Foundation of Floyd County has donated \$20 million, covering the bulk of the construction costs, but getting government approval and backup financing for the project took from 2002 to 2006 — “four years of politics,” as YMCA fundraising leader Mike Ricke put it..

“Did you ever think it would be so difficult to spend \$20 million?” asked Joe LaRocca, YMCA executive director, to Caesars Indiana general manager Ed Garruto.

Mayor James Garner singled out Caesars for thanks and called the project “just the tip of the iceberg for downtown New Albany.”

The visible results of the four-year grind were audible as well. Mark Truman had to raise his voice into the microphone as trucks dumped rocks onto a future Scribner Place parking lot.

“It’s going on right now, isn’t that great?” said Truman, vice president of operations for Floyd Memorial. Before some in the crowd moved on to The Grand to continue celebrating, a theater group from New Albany High School sparked a brief disco resurgence with their performance of The Village People’s “YMCA”. Many clapped and danced along with them, and LaRocca implored everyone to return when the investment pays off.

“Hopefully, we’ll see you back here in 18 to 24 months,” LaRocca said.

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Photos



Four members of the New Albany High School theatre department, including Cameron Hobbs, right, dressed as members of the Village People and performed the Y.M.C.A. following the groundbreaking for Scribner Place Monday morning. Staff photo by Kevin McGloshen