

L.C. Walker Arena to be renamed as Mercy Health Arena in 2020

By Source: MLive, 10/23/19, 1:30PM EDT

MUSKEGON, MI - The stalwart L.C. Walker Arena will become the Mercy Health Arena starting in January.

The new name is part of a 15-year naming rights agreement recently brokered between the city of Muskegon, the Muskegon Lumberjacks hockey team and Mercy Health.

The arena is currently named after Louis Carlisle Walker, founder of the Shaw-Walker Furniture Co., which was at one time the city's largest employer. Walker also was a philanthropist and donated the arena to the city in 1960.

The name change takes effect at the turn of the year and the L.C. Walker signage around the building will be replaced with Mercy Health logos sometime in January

Mercy Health will pay the city of Muskegon \$100,000 each year to keep its namesake on the arena, said Gary Allore, president of Mercy Health Muskegon.

Allore, along with City Manager Frank Peterson, Mayor Stephen Gawron and Justin Curtis of HCK Hospitality, revealed the name change Wednesday, Oct. 23, at a press conference held in the arena.

Allore said the agreement will help cement Mercy Health's place in Muskegon history. Allore also said Mercy Health was excited to continue the philanthropic legacy of the late L.C. Walker.

"I know I absolutely speak for our board, our medical staff and our colleagues when I say how proud we are to sign this deal with the city," Allore said. "We know how important the development of downtown is ... and we're excited to keep that moving forward."

Allore said he, Peterson and Lumberjacks President of Business Operations Mike McCall have been talking about a naming rights deal over last few months, culminating in Wednesday's announcement.

Any time Mercy Health takes on a new project or venture, Allore added, the company tests that prospect against its mission statement: "to serve together in the spirit of the Gospel as a compassionate and transforming healing presence."

“This arena fits perfectly with our mission statement,” Allore said. “It was a quick yes for us, and it was quickly supported within our organization. When you test the idea of partnering with the city, in this community, this is certainly a transformation and revitalization of the downtown.”

Peterson said he was delighted to enter into the agreement with Mercy Health which he said has become one of the city’s largest stakeholders.

The city manager also thanked the Walker family who gifted the arena to the city of Muskegon nearly 60 years ago.

“I had a chance to talk to the grandson of the late L.C. Walker, and I let him know about the commitment Mercy was putting into the arena,” Peterson said. “He was ecstatic to find out that the city found another great local partner to invest in the arena and to carry on the legacy of his grandfather.”

In a separate interview with Muskegon Chronicle/MLive.com, Peterson said the \$100,000 annual naming rights fee could increase over the next 15 years depending on maintenance needs at the facility.

Curtis’ HCK will be building a new restaurant at the southern portion of the arena which is slated to open in 2020. The new restaurant will be called Carlisle’s in homage to Walker.

Once built, Carlisle’s will be a 2,181 square-foot restaurant in a 3,500 square-foot space near the southern entrance of the arena. HCK also plans to incorporate patio seating for up to 70 people and has an option to build a second-story mezzanine dining space later.

The restaurant is to incorporate local sports themes with memorabilia from area teams.

Mercy Health is a regional, multi-campus, Catholic health care system serving West Michigan and the lakeshore with four hospital campuses, more than 90 physician offices, hospice, home health and long-term care service offerings.

The L.C. Walker Arena and Events Center is the current home of the Muskegon Lumberjacks USHL hockey team, the Muskegon Risers indoor soccer team and the West Michigan Ironmen indoor football team. The arena also hosts concerts, youth hockey leagues, public skating, graduation, circuses and more.

L.C. Walker Arena was completed in 1960 and was built on the site of a former supermarket using \$1 million from Walker’s estate.

Walker, who founded the Muskegon-based Shaw-Walker Furniture Co. in 1869, died in 1963 - just three years after donating his namesake arena to the city of Muskegon.

At least \$1.7 million in renovation projects at the arena wrapped up in fall 2018, which include upgrades to suite boxes, club and lodge seating, and the creation of a party platform that includes a beer garden, bar and a kid's zone.

Several other renovations to HVAC and mechanical equipment occurred this year.