

First Class Club Fund Rabble Rousers

Tony Smith - September 2016

Classmates:

Dale Hruby, Munge Moore, Brad Johnson, and I spent two full days at West Point working on the First Class Club (FCC) last week. We met with reps from the Directorate of Cadet Activities (DCA), the Corps of Engineers (NY District), Reilly Construction, and the classes of '83 and '08. We toured the on-going construction a couple of times. We did a thorough triage of the photos that hung in the old FCC. And, of course, we spent an evening in the ersatz FCC in Ike Hall, which has been doing double duty as the Cow and Firstie Club.

Construction looks good, on schedule to hand over the building by end of January 2017, after which the DCA will install the furniture and furnishings. Reilly Construction, home based in Chantilly, VA, has done a lot of work at West Point for the Corps of Engineers. Their superintendent's last job was the rehab of the Statue of Liberty following Hurricane Sandy.

The plan is to have a "soft" opening in mid-March 2017, where they will debug the operation, and then hold the official "hard" opening on 27 March as the cadets return from Spring Leave. (Don't mark your calendars in indelible ink; as we all know, construction, particularly government construction, has a way of slipping. They are determined, however, to have the Club open before the class of 2017 puts on their gold bars.)

The FCC will look a lot different than what you are familiar with. The kitchen is where the A/V room used to be. The bar will extend several times longer than the woefully inadequate bar in the old club. There will be 24 TV sets, increasing the number of TVs several fold. Concrete has replaced the wooden floor. A section of the club can be closed off for meetings. The games (shuffleboard and pool tables) and a juke box will be located on the patio, which, thanks to the retractable roof that '58 had installed a couple of years ago, can be used year round. A pager system will tell cadets when their food orders are ready. All of

these improvements reflect, so the DCA says, extensive conversations they have held with cadets.

We did point out one design flaw that will need correcting. As currently configured, women walking to the ladies room are offered an unobstructed view of the urinals in the men's room when the door is open. These are very cool, pre-World War II urinals that we salvaged and retained when we did the major rehab of the FCC in 2008, but it's probable that their retro look might not be fully appreciated by female cadets and guests.

We have stressed to the DCA that we are very insistent that the "every cadet an athlete" theme that marked the decorations in the old club be retained. To this end, the four of us spent a good eight hours examining every one of the great sports photos that hung for better than 20 years to select the best that we want to see reframed and rehung in the new club. Recognizing the need to update the photos to reflect the years since 1993 and the new sports since then, particularly women's sports, we have asked the classes of '83 and '08 to take on the task of selecting more recent photos to be hung.

As we prepare to pass on the mantle of graduate FCC oversight, we had a very constructive meeting with the designated class reps from '83 and '08. Between the three classes and the DCA, we have reached agreement on financing the furnishing of the new Club. (To remind, USMA has budgeted on the order of \$3,700,000 of appropriated funds for the reconstruction; these funds will not cover the furniture and furnishings that will be needed.) The DCA is paying for design, kitchen equipment, and small wares (pots, pans, glassware, utensils, etc.). '58 will pay for new furniture, framing of new photos, and reframing of old photos (virtually all the old frames are shot). '83 will pay for everything that has to do with the bar (bar equipment, beer dispensing system, walk-in beer cooler, etc.). '08 will cover all the costs associated with the new A/V systems.

We do not have final costs for any of this. Best guess at this time is that we will need \$325K-350K to cover our share, '83 about the same or maybe a little bit more, and '08 about \$100K. '83 and '08 have committed to their shares. (My guesstimates above do not build in contingency overruns, so the costs could be higher.)

I think that pretty well covers it. This has been a long slog, but it's exciting to see the new FCC coming together. While it was truly a pity that two graduating classes have not been able to use the Club, the necessity to rebuild the FCC has given USMA the opportunity to correct a number of shortcomings in the old club. The First Class Club remains the most appreciated (by cadets) class gift ever, and the new version will be an considerable improvement over the old. I'm pleased also that we are developing a sound continuity of operations plan as we leave the scene. We will hand over the reins next March on a high note.

By the way, lest you feel too sorry for us (not too much danger of that, I'd guess), we did have some fun along the way. Bonnie elaborated a fine touring program for our ladies who came along with us, and we discovered a couple of pretty good restaurants in Cornwall and Cold Spring. We dined Thursday nite at the ersatz FCC and listened live to Coach Monken's weekly radio show. (This is the only time that the Great American Public is invited to the Club, and it takes place while the cadets are at the mandatory Thursday evening dinner.) Over the past couple of years, the FCC has expanded their menu significantly, and I actually enjoyed a quite well-prepared, fancy burger - never thought I'd say that about the FCC cuisine.

Best regards to all,

Tony

P.S. I learned on this visit that we got some help from an unexpected quarter in pushing USMA to move forward on the rehab. Apparently someone in the class of '16 got to Graduation Speaker Joe Biden, who, while on the podium, leaned over to the Supe and said in a loud voice, "Hey, Supe, when are you going to fix the First Class Club?"