

## Gary and Nancy Chartrand donate \$200,000 for new Morning Star fitness center

Morning Star School, the only special education school in the Diocese of St. Augustine serving K-12 children with learning and intellectual differences, will soon break ground on a new fitness center thanks to a \$200,000 donation from the Gary and Nancy Chartrand Advised Fund.

“We are extremely grateful to the Chartrand family for helping us make this important addition to our campus,” said Morning Star School Director of Development Maria Johnson. “It has never been more important to teach our students how to stay fit and healthy in a fun outdoor atmosphere. It is an important part of a positive learning experience, especially in our current pandemic environment.

While all students at Morning Star School will use the outdoor fitness center, Johnson said it will be specifically designed for the older students – since the school already has a playground geared to the needs of the younger students. The project will include an open fitness field with artificial turf, exercise equipment including parallel parts, a square pull-up station and a ‘double turbo challenge’ area – along with the construction of a three-foot retaining wall at the rear of the property. It also provides a huge open field for all types of play.

“We feel strongly that the excellence that Morning Star School provides in the classroom should be available to

students when they are outside as well,” said Nancy Chartrand in regard to the gift made from the Gary and Nancy Chartrand Advised Fund at The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida. “Having a state-of-the-art outdoor fitness area will not only meet the needs and unique abilities of these young people, but it will encourage healthy activities and habits that are so important in life.”

Johnson noted that the students at Morning Star School also assisted in fundraising for the outdoor fitness center – with junior and senior high school students participating in a fundraiser selling Spanky’s Gourmet Pickles to help raise funds for the project.

“This time of uncertainty we just faced with COVID-19 is a great example of why the fitness center area is of great importance,” said ‘Coach’ Natalie Bryan, a physical education teacher at Morning Star. “Stress is inevitable and, as it varies for individuals old and young, the fitness center contributes to good health and helps to address stress, even now. Also, students who maintain their fitness and good health are more likely to become active healthy adults – improving student learning while reducing obesity and participation in high-risk behaviors, as well.”

Permitting is now under way for the project, with construction scheduled to begin later this year.



A rendering of the playground equipment to be installed in the new outdoor fitness center to be built at Morning Star School.



The location of the new outdoor fitness center that will be built at Morning Star School thanks to a \$200,000 donation from Gary and Nancy Chartrand

The school, which shifted to virtual learning only for all students in March, plans to open on Monday, August 10 for the 2020-21 school year offering a hybrid-learning model of in-person and virtual education.