

## Good sports: Schafers' athletic center is ready to roll



Jonathan Schafer and Shannon Schafer, co-owners of Schafer Sports Center in Ewing.

—PHOTOS BY AARON HOUSTON

BY ANDREW SHELDON

It was the proverbial long road full of detours and roadblocks. But after 11 years of planning, anticipation and every headache imaginable, **Schafer Sports Center** finally cut the ribbon on its new 37,800-square-foot Ewing facility in August.

And co-owners **Jonathan Schafer** and **Shannon Schafer** couldn't be happier.

"I'm grateful that we are finally here," Shannon Schafer said. "I can tell you that I won't be building anything else anytime soon."

And, according to the Schafers, the investment in time and money — the budget for the project was \$3.6 million — looks like it may ultimately pay off.

With the expansion, the company has created whole new offerings and revenue streams that have already generated a lot of interest.

Take, for instance, the new indoor turf field designed for soccer and lacrosse. According to Shannon Schafer, that space is already booked from open to close on Sundays through March.

"In the last two and a half weeks, every

### Biz in brief

**COMPANY:** Schafer Sports Center

**FOUNDER:** Jonathan Schafer

**FOUNDED:** 1988

**HEADQUARTERS:** Ewing

**ONE LAST THING:** **Jonathan Schafer** opened the facility in 1988, the same year as the Olympics in Seoul, South Korea. "It's always a good year to open a gymnastics school: I think we had expected 200 kids to start, and we had 450."

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time available on this turf has been secured by soccer leagues,” she said. “On Sundays starting on Nov. 20, this turf will be used from 7:30 in the morning until 11 at night, and that’s only with adult soccer.”

The new facility also includes an indoor pool that she believes will generate a whole new healthy opportunity for steady clientele because of the high demand for swimming classes.

“If you run a swimming program half-decently with three things — hot water, shallow pools so your teachers can stand and you have a thought-out curriculum — you’ll get a lot more kids in your swim program than in your gymnastics

program,” Jonathan Schafer said. “That’s simply because everybody wants their child to swim, where only about 10 percent of kids do gymnastics.”

The company offers swimming lessons for kids as young as 6 weeks old, but it also plans to expand into swimming classes for seniors.

“We’re going to be launching a seniors program during the daytime because it’s warm water and it’s not being used in the daytime,” Shannon Schafer said. “There’s no other senior center around here, so we thought we could get them in the water for water aerobics and using the pool as therapy.”

Having built the facility from the ground up out of an empty lot, the company was able to design the complex with everything it wanted. This included expanding the offerings of the company’s bread and butter: its gymnastics education.

“We did add some new bells and whistles, like a broad floor for tumbling or a trench bar pit, which teaches students how to swing giants around the bar,” Shannon Schafer said. “We figured out what we wanted the new space to look like and designed it exactly like what we wanted it to be.”

## Warm water pools: So hot right now

One of the most interesting features at the new **Schafer Sports Center** is its indoor warm water pool, right. Co-owners **Jonathan Schafer** and **Shannon Schafer** spent time researching and traveling to other pool facilities in North Carolina and Florida to learn the best practices for swim training.

For instance, they noticed a common trend to keep the pool water at 90 degrees and adopted the practice.

“We felt like having warm water would be much better for kids to want to be in the water learning and focusing on what you’re teaching them versus freezing, shivering and not taking in what you’re trying to teach them,” Shannon Schafer said. “So, a lot of the schools in Florida and North Carolina all had warm water pools.”

The pool room itself is heated to stay around 88 degrees, and even the changing room for the swimming area is kept at a higher temperature than the rest of the facility.

The best validation, the Schafers said, is that they students have been reacting positively to the new space.

“The students seem to love it,” Shannon Schafer said, “so it feels good to be here.”

