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Health Care

2 colleges to partner with PT group on new specialty center




The new exoskeletal systems to be offered at the Daemen University IMIT at Villa Maria will offer specialized rehab opportunities for patients and students.

TIMO_VOLZ



By Tracey Drury – Senior Reporter, Buffalo Business First
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A specialty program that combines robotics with traditional physical therapy is a step closer to opening in the Buffalo region, with new partners and new funding.

Daemen University will partner with Villa Maria College and Buffalo Rehab Group to develop its Institute for Mobility Innovation & Technology, with plans to site the center on the Villa campus in Buffalo.

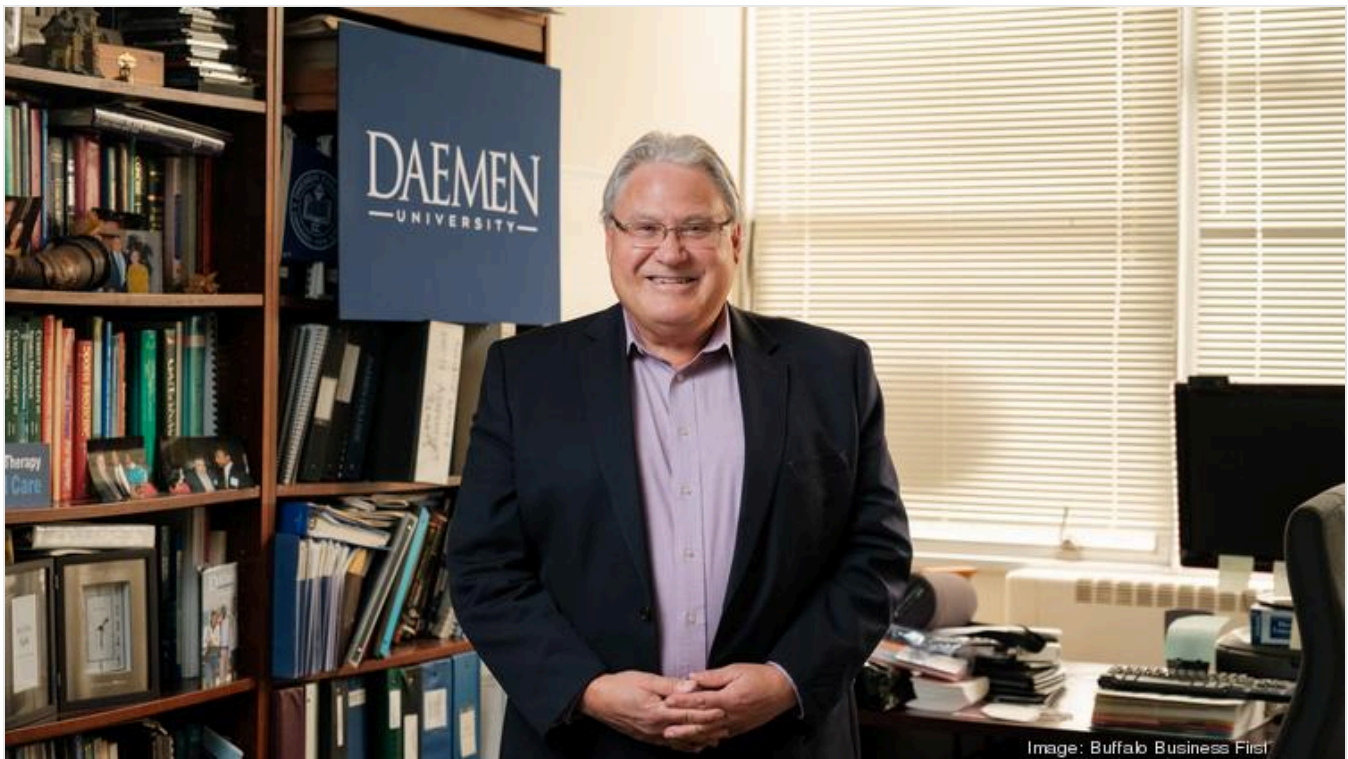
The exoskeletal center has been in the works for more than five years.

The Daemen University IMIT at Villa Maria College will use robotic-assisted gait training and assistive technology combined with physical and occupational therapy.

It will offer rehabilitation services for people affected by spinal cord injury and neurological and other conditions such as cerebral palsy, Parkinson's or traumatic brain injuries.

The project has changed in several ways over the years, said Michael Brogan, executive vice president for academic affairs, provost and a PT professor at Daemen.

Brogan began developing the IMIT center five years ago with Laura Edsberg, who directs both the Natural and Health Sciences Research Center and the Center for Wound Healing Research at the university.



Mike Brogan, provost, Daemen University.

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“We learned we needed additional space, we needed the business expertise and we needed community engagement,” he said. “We put together a group that working together and co-locating in the same space would allow us to meet not only our vision but go far beyond that.”

The business and clinical expertise for the partnership comes from Buffalo Rehab Group, which runs more than a dozen area sites across the region.

President/CEO Jeff Woodrich said having the IMIT center here will allow patients to remain in the region for specialized care. And for those with limited means, it might be the first and only time they can even access this type of care.

There could also be additional spinoff activity since the center is likely to draw patients from outside the region as well. Woodrich said he’s already had conversations with area neurosurgeons.

“It’s going to be a national center. It is world-class technology here,” he said. “This has been lacking in our community, this advanced level of neurological care.”



Villa Maria College's Cheektowaga campus.

Matthew Giordano, president of Villa Maria, said the center will be in a 6,000-square-foot space inside the athletic center.

The center will serve the community as well as offer opportunities for students in several of its programs, including PT assistant and OT assistant.

“It also fits perfectly with our mission and our values and with everything we’re trying to do as an institution to be of service to the larger community,” he said. “To bring this type of clinic to this community is a really big deal.”

The space at Villa is a third larger than a previous site planned on Kensington Avenue in Amherst at the Phillips Brothers Supply Inc. site. Daemen had initially **planned to put the center** there with help from a naming rights gift from the Todd and Leslie Shatkin Foundation.

Changing the location also meant losing the Shatkin gift, but a \$1.2 million state grant secured through state Sen. Tim Kennedy helps fund renovations at Villa Maria.

Another \$1.75 million was raised to cover equipment and operational costs. That’s enough to start the project and provide about 75% of the funds needed to operate for the first three years.

Additional fundraising is ongoing - including the possibility of another naming rights opportunity.

Kennedy - an occupational therapist by training – said the project is a people-driven partnership and also results in an economic investment in the Villa Maria campus and surrounding community.

“When I think about the real partnership that is being created between Villa Maria College and Buffalo Rehab and Daemen University to create this Institute for Mobility, what really strikes me is the community approach, that it’s not just about those entities but the fact they are opening this incredible investment and resource up to the community,” he said.

Daemen will hire two administrators and the partners will bring dozens of clinical staff and students into the space to provide 400-500 weekly therapy sessions once the center reaches full capacity.

With Lamparelli Construction signed on as contractor, Sutton Architecture PLLC has begun providing design work and filing the necessary permits.

The institute is expected to be operational by this fall.