Work on new facilities is underway

Back hoes and earth movers work as construction on the new Allan Hancock College baseball field is underway.

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It is an exciting time of the year for Allan Hancock College athletics director Kim Ensing as the fall season is just about to get underway.

Not only will Hancock begin practice soon for men’s and women’s soccer, women’s volleyball and football, but the school has just begun construction on several athletic facilities that will benefit the student-athletes at the school for years to come.

“It’s a very exciting and stressful time,” Ensing said in an interview this week.

With money remaining from the Bond Measure I that passed in June, 2000, the school has begun to relocate the John Osborne Field baseball facility across the street on College Drive next to the current softball field.

Hancock will then replace the track at a new location near the athletics building as the school expands Educational Building 0. There will be an upgrade of practice facilities for the football and soccer teams as well.

While the construction goes on, the soccer teams will be displaced with practice and home games off campus.

“They will be practicing at Crossroads and playing (matches) at Santa Maria High School,” Ensing explained. “We’ve been working on this schedule for almost a year now in order to manage as little impact as possible.

“Of course at the end of the day, our student-athletes are going to be the most inconvenienced, but at the same time, our student-athletes are going to reap the benefits of having new fields to play on.”

All of this excitement coincide as Ensing and her staff get ready for competition beginning on Saturday, Aug. 25, when the women’s volleyball team competes in the Cuesta Tournament. Women’s soccer begins with a home game against Taft on Tuesday, Aug. 28. Men’s soccer starts at the Hartnell Tournament on Friday, Aug. 31, the same day football opens at Santa Barbara.

The Fall season, however, will kick off, as it usually does, with the 11th annual Joe White Memorial Dinner and Auction, this year being held on Saturday, Aug. 10, at the Santa Maria Fairpark.

The Joe White dinner has been a huge success, benefiting athletic facility upgrades which started by renovating the gymnasium, named in honor of Joe White, the longtime athletics director at Hancock, who brought legendary coaches like Bill Bertka, John Madden, John McCutchen and John Osborne to the school with much success.

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"This event has donated over a half a million dollars to our athletic facilities and that group is willing to keep going," Ensing continued.

The John Osborne baseball facility was next, honoring Osborne, who coached baseball and led the Bulldogs to a state championship, before replacing White as the AD. The softball facility is currently being upgraded with the Joe White money.

Now, as Ensing prepares for the fall season, she will also oversee the new upgrades that are already underway.

"We are hoping to play our first baseball game on the new field in January," she said. "We will be hosting a special baseball alumni event in association with that.

"They are actually going to close the current track in August and the field inside it, so, when that happens, there will be a domino effect."

Ensing explained that football team will practice on the soccer fields and the soccer teams will then make their move off campus.

"Baseball will stay put in the fall then move across the street in January," Ensing continued. "Then in January, they will take down the current baseball field and soccer fields to build the new track, football and soccer areas.

"Hopefully that will be done by August 2013 — That's the plan."

Of course with all the construction going on, athletics will still have to compete.

"I walked out to our summer football class," Ensing said. "And to see the numbers out there and things heating up was exciting."

A new presence during football season will be the Internet. Once again, Hancock will webcast the Bulldog football games on the AHC website and the hope is for an upgrade there as well, with the addition of video. And longtime ESPN personality C.J. Silas will be handling the play-by-play duties with color commentator Irvin Kiger.

"What I know of her career is impressive," Ensing said about Silas, who has been a sports broadcaster for more than 20 years. "She has done some groundbreaking things and is passionate about everything she does."

Women's soccer hopes to improve even more after an amazing turnaround last season. After going 0-16 the year before, Hancock went 19-9-1.

"It was a 180-turnaround," Ensing said. "In 2010, we weren't sure we were putting an entire team on the bus from day to day, then in 2011, we were one or two games away from making the playoffs."

Men's soccer looks to improve after going a competitive 9-9-4 last season.

"You always are going to have exciting athletes in men's soccer," Ensing said. "Last year, a couple of kicks would have told a whole different story of the season."

Women's volleyball has struggled but Ensing likes what she sees.

"We are fortunate to have found Julio Molina," she explained. "Last season there were not a lot of wins, but I trust the integrity of the program and the direction he is going."

The fall gets underway with eligibility meetings and physicals on Tuesday, Aug. 7.