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# Marietta Daily Journal

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MARIETTA | RECREATION

## Custer Park renovation set to open in Sept.

City considering charging membership fees to help offset center's operation costs after \$2.5M in work

By Brittini Ray  
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**MARIETTA** — Marietta residents will have a revamped fitness and recreation center this fall, but there may be membership fees to offset some of the operational costs.

The city is moving into the final stages of a \$2.5 million renovation of the Custer Park Recreation Center, near the intersection of Kenneth E Marcus Way and North Fairground Street.

It is scheduled to open to the public in September.

The renovated building, which sits on a 3.8-acre tract, will feature a two-story, 27,500-square-foot building and include a range of fitness equipment, said Rich Buss, the city parks director.

The center will include two fitness rooms outfitted with new technology called "fitness on

demand," which will feature drop down screens for video viewing and audio input capabilities for group fitness classes, Buss added.

The center's renovations, which are funded by 2009 parks bond money, started in spring 2014 and are expected to be completed by June, but will officially be open to the public in September, Buss said.

"That's when the parking lot should be finished. We're tying things to the parking lot. The building construction itself will be done before that, but then we've got to come in and install our furniture and computer systems and equipment. Then we need to train our folks as well so we can provide optimal customer service for the folks that are going to be paying to use the place."

The recreation center will also feature a gymnasium with

CUSTER, 3A



City Councilwoman Michelle Cooper Kelly, left, Parks Bond Project Manager Rich Deckman, City Councilman Anthony Coleman and Marietta Parks and Recreation Director Rich Buss talk about the renovations to the Custer Park Recreation Center outside of the center in Marietta on Thursday. The renovations are set to open in September.

Staff-C.B. Schmelter

COBB | SUPER SENIOR



Marietta High School senior Abraham Leon attends a group study session the evening before an International Baccalaureate exam Saturday. Leon received a scholarship to attend the University of Notre Dame. He is a first-generation American who began attending Marietta City Schools in second grade. / Staff-Kathryn Ingall

### THE ABRAHAM LEON FILE

**AGE:** 18  
**SCHOOL:** Marietta High School  
**RESIDENCE:** Marietta  
**GRADUATION DATE:** May 23  
**FAMILY:** Twin brother, Daniel; two younger sisters, Fatima, 16, and Monica, 12; parents, Tomas and Zonia  
**COLLEGE:** University of Notre Dame  
**MAJOR:** Leaning toward chemistry, wants to be a doctor  
**CHURCH:** Saint Joseph Catholic Church  
**EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES:** Plays guitar for church choir, varsity wrestling, president of Beta Club, vice president of National Honor Society, involved in church youth group and is a math tutor  
**INSPIRATIONS:** "By far, everyone who has supported me: My parents, my teachers and my coaches."  
**GPA:** 4.46

**THIS IS THE FIRST IN A SERIES:** The MDJ will profile an exceptional Cobb senior each Monday in the month of May to celebrate the graduating class of 2015.

## 'It just humbles me'

After moving from El Salvador at age 9, Marietta High student bound for Notre Dame on scholarship

By Philip Clements  
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**MARIETTA** — When his family emigrated from El Salvador, Abraham Leon was 9 years old and didn't speak any English — now he's graduating third in his class at Marietta High School.

"As soon as we got here, we were placed in English to Speakers of Other Languages class and we took two years of that and then got out of it," Leon said. "After those two years, there was no difference between me and anybody else."

Leon will be attending the University of Notre Dame on a

\$63,000 scholarship in the fall, where he hopes to study chemistry or another science in preparation for medical school.

Leon said Notre Dame caught his eye when he was looking at schools, specifically the beauty of the campus.

"I wanted to attend a college that was a good combination of academics and social life and Notre Dame has both of those," Leon said. "Big football school and big on academics, as well."

#### COMING TO AMERICA

Leon's family emigrated from

El Salvador when he was nine in

2006 and has lived in Marietta ever since. He said he wasn't told they were moving beforehand and he didn't speak any English when he arrived.

"At first, it was kind of weird. There was a lot of getting used to everything changing," Leon said. "Your whole life is turned upside

down, but life goes on."

"I overcame the language barrier and the culture shock. Just having supportive teachers and seeing my parents sacrifice

their time to help me get a better life motivated me to do well," Leon said.

He said he always thinks about his roots when he is starting some-

thing to make sure he lives up to the opportunity he has been given.

"It just humbles me and reminds me who I am and what I should be doing, and it just motivates me to do my best," he said. "I have an opportunity and I should take advantage of it; I shouldn't throw it away."

Leon's parents — Tomas and Zonia — said they came to America to find more opportunities for their family and to look for a better place to live without as much delinquency.

Leon still translates for them and noted it is more difficult to learn

BOUND, 6A







Marietta High School senior Abraham Leon stands at the school on Saturday. Leon will be attending the University of Notre Dame on a \$63,000 scholarship in the fall, where he hopes to study chemistry or another science in preparation for medical school. / Staff-Kathryn Ingall

BOUND

From 1A

a new language the older you get, although they do understand written English much better than conversational English.

“At first, it was very hard, especially with the language,” Tomas Leon said. “Fortunately, our children caught up to the culture quickly. We have overcome most of the challenges now.”

They said they are proud of their son and all of his accomplishments.

“Because even with countless difficulties, he is having an excellent opportunity to continue studying,” Tomas Leon said. “Not many people get this chance. He is doing very well because God is helping so much. God has opened a lot of doors for him and for our entire family.”

Leon’s parents said they are both nervous about him going to school all the way in Indiana.

“But we are happy and trusting that he is not alone,” Zonia Leon said. “God and us are with him.”

Marietta High School Principal Leigh Colburn said despite the language barrier, Leon’s parents are always there for him and his siblings.

“Education is a high priority in their family,” Colburn said. “Still, when it comes to helping him with his homework or even helping him navigate the process of applying for American colleges, it’s just not something he can get at home.”

RENAISSANCE MAN

Debbie Woolard, the International Baccalaureate coordinator at Marietta High School, said Leon is a candidate for the International Baccalaureate diploma. He is going to be taking his IB exams this week.

“As such, he is an accomplished, well-rounded student, dedicated to excellence,” Woolard said. “He’s ranked third in his class, is an athlete, a musician, an actor and servant of his school and community.”

As part of the IB program, Leon had to learn a foreign language and chose French, making him trilingual. He also said his knowledge of Spanish helped him learn French.

Colburn said Leon has shown a great deal of academic resilience and personal intention over the years.

“A lot of teenagers aren’t looking past next month, much less looking five or 10 years down the

line,” Colburn said. “But Abraham tends to do that. He recognizes the opportunities he has in front of him and he makes the most of that.”

Woolard said Leon has a keen sense of responsibility, a strong work ethic and a determination to persevere through challenges. She said she often calls on Leon to speak with younger students because of his ability to motivate and inspire others.

“I heard him speak to a group of students at the National Honor Society induction earlier this week on the topic of scholarship and he advised the inductees in a very genuine way to learn for the sake of learning and if they did this, grades and achievement would naturally follow,” Woolard said.

She said Leon is successful because he is not afraid to tackle a challenge. She said he lives the words of a credo he wrote as an athlete in a required reflective writing:

“To be the very best wrestler you can be. Learn to give 110 percent every time. When something feels difficult, keep working. Grow in maturity and character through sport. Show commitment and perseverance.”

Barbara Manwell, one of Leon’s teachers at Marietta High, said what sticks out in her mind when she thinks about Leon is his humble nature.

“Despite his genuine talent and achievement, he brings almost no attention to himself,” Manwell said. “He has a wonderful attitude about his own ability and has a kind and genuine approach to people.”

Manwell said Leon is a diligent and dedicated student and attributes his success to his own internal drive, as well as the support from his family.

“I have known him for four years and have always seen him as a student who is constantly curious and seeking ways that he can improve,” Manwell said. “Abraham is the type of student who never discounts the value of what he is learning or can learn.”

She said she believes she has been privileged to teach Leon and looks forward to what the future holds for him.

“Abraham so clearly desires to do the most that he can with what he has been given,” Manwell said. “It is obvious that he is thankful for the opportunities he has been afforded and does not take them for granted.”

AP | DEATH IN CUSTODY

Baltimore mayor lifts the curfew 6 days after riots

**BALTIMORE —** Six days after riots sparked by Freddie Gray’s death, Baltimore’s mayor lifted a citywide curfew Sunday and faith leaders called for continued activism until justice is achieved.

A jubilant crowd of several hundred prayed and sang civil-rights anthems at a City Hall rally. Sunday’s peaceful gathering came two days after the city’s top prosecutor announced criminal charges against six officers involved in Gray’s arrest.

Speaker after speaker exhorted the crowd not to rest just because the officers have been charged. The Rev. Jamal Bryant, a fiery leader of the protests that followed Gray’s April 12 arrest and the death of the 25-year-old black man a week later, drew deafening cheers when he said the officers deserve jail time.

“We’ve got to see this all the way through, until all six officers trade in their blue uniform for an orange uniform,” Bryant said. “Let them know: Orange is the new black.”

The Rev. Lisa Weah, pastor of the New Bethlehem Baptist Church in Gray’s neighborhood, said the message of equal justice for all must not be lost.

“Our prayer is that Baltimore will be the model for the rest of the nation,” she said.

Police said Sunday that 486 people had been arrested since April 23, and that 113 officers had been injured at riots and protests. The extent of the officers’ injuries was unclear. Earlier in the week, police had said that out of nearly 100 injured officers, 13 were hurt to the extent that they



The remains of a building that burned during the riots following Freddie Gray’s funeral stands Sunday in Baltimore. Six days after riots sparked by Gray’s death, Baltimore’s mayor lifted a citywide curfew Sunday and faith leaders called for continued activism until justice is achieved. / AP

couldn’t work, and 15 were on desk duty.

The order for residents to stay home between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. had been in place since Tuesday; officials had originally planned to maintain it through Monday morning. Protests since last Monday’s riots have been peaceful, and Friday’s announcement of charges eased tensions.

Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake announced the curfew’s end in a statement.

“My number one priority in instituting a curfew was to ensure the public peace, safety, health and welfare of Baltimore citizens,” the Democratic mayor said. “It was not an easy decision, but one I felt was necessary to help our city restore calm.”

State’s Attorney Marilyn Mosby has said Gray died after suffering a broken neck while inside a police van. On Friday, Mosby filed charges against the officers

involved in his arrest and transport. One is charged with second-degree murder. Three others are charged with involuntary manslaughter and two with second-degree assault.

Mosby said Gray’s neck was broken because he was placed head-first in a police van, handcuffed and later in leg shackles, where he was left to slam against the walls of the small metal compartment. Police said the officers who arrested Gray ignored his cries for help because they thought he was faking his injuries. He was repeatedly denied medical attention.

Rioting and looting erupted hours after Gray’s funeral last Monday. A 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew was ordered Tuesday after a night of violence, looting and arson. About 3,000 National Guard soldiers were deployed to the city along with 1,000 extra police officers, including some from out of state.



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