ANDERSON - About 600 freshmen moved into Anderson University dorms Saturday, just in time for school officials to break ground for a new softball field and tennis courts.

University President Evans Whitaker was joined by athletic director Nancy Simpson and several athletes and coaches at the former Anderson County Fairgrounds site Saturday afternoon to officially begin its transformation into an athletic campus for the university. The new softball field, tennis center and recreational swimming pool for Anderson students should be completed by February of next year, Simpson said.

She said the artificial turf softball field and multitude of tennis courts would be an attractive destination for NCAA and Southern Athletic Conference events, which in turn would be valuable revenue sources for the university and the local economy. Further plans for a new baseball stadium, seating and a track around the soccer field, an auxiliary gymnasium and more recreation facilities for students are contingent on fundraising and development efforts, such as selling naming rights to campus facilities and appeals to donors.

Simpson and Dean Woods, the university’s vice president for institutional advancement, said they were satisfied with the fundraising efforts so far. They declined to estimate the scale and cost of the planned facilities until there is a clearer indication of how much money will be available for construction.

The university also is nearly three-quarters of the way done with its $15 million campaign to build a new student activity center on campus. Woods said that development campaign — the largest in the university’s history — has progressed well. But the last few million dollars are expected to be the toughest to raise, he said.

“It’s hard raising that last $4 million or so on gifts of $10,000, $15,000 or $25,000,” he said.
Woods was quick to add, however, that the pace of giving has remained steady, and he believes the university will be able to break ground on the new center sometime next spring.

University spokesman Barry Ray said the 802 freshmen and new transfer students expected this weekend would push the school’s overall enrollment close to 3,200, making it the fastest-growing private university in South Carolina.

They were welcomed Saturday by an army of resident advisers and upperclassmen ready to help unload cars and get the newbies set up in dorms.

“We probably had about 120 or so who started showing up around 9 this morning,” said Ben Aalderink, residence director for Lawton Hall and Rouse House.

The traffic had died down by early afternoon, allowing some of Aalderink’s charges to flop down onto couches to rest sore backs and arms. The upperclassmen said they didn’t notice many signs of nervousness or potential homesickness, nor too many clinging parents — just lots of televisions, chairs, ironing boards, desks and other staples of college dorm life.

“Everybody seemed really comfortable with everything,” said Victoria Stephens, a junior resident adviser from Greenville. “They were really happy to see the moving in crews when they pulled up.”

Resident advisers Larz Williams, Emily Bowen, Greg Malone and Ryan Willis all agreed with Stephens. They said the new arrivals appear to be a good lot, at least from what they can tell so far.

“It will take them a couple of weeks to get comfortable,” said Williams, a senior from Greer. “We try to stay pretty tight about the rules in the beginning so they know the (behavior) bar is set pretty high.”

Resident advisers Amanda Pace and Diamond Huggins Marshall reported helping “about 60” freshmen get moved in Saturday to Kingsley Hall.

“Some of them were a little nervous, and I think they were really shocked when we were here to help them get their stuff moved into their rooms,” said Pace, a senior from Spartanburg.
Marshall agreed with her counterparts at Lawton and Rouse — she thinks the freshmen she saw Saturday will adjust to college life just fine.

“It’s your first year in college, so you stay out late and do stuff like that,” said Marshall, a junior from Germantown, Maryland, who is beginning her second year as a resident adviser. “I didn’t experience anything too crazy from them (freshmen) last year.”

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