



**ERNIE ELS  
ELS FOR AUTISM®**



**CAPITAL CAMPAIGN  
FOR THE SPECIALIZED AUTISM  
FRIENDLY RECREATION COMPLEX**

**AT THE ELS CENTER OF EXCELLENCE® CAMPUS**



# WHY RECREATION?

Research has demonstrated that recreation, particularly sports, can be an effective supplemental therapy for individuals with autism. All of our programs and services, including our recreation classes and camps are infused with evidence-based practices to maximize learning outcomes for all participants.





# CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

## Specialized Autism Friendly Recreation Complex

*Els for Autism is **leading the way** by building the first sports and recreation facility in the United States to be considered ASPECTSS® compliant. ASPECTSS is the first research-based architectural design framework for autism worldwide.*



Our campus currently includes an outdoor basketball and tennis court, a 3-green, 9-hole golf course, sensory arts garden, playgrounds, and a 26,000-square-foot fenced courtyard to support our clients in leading active lifestyles. However, South Florida's climate often presents challenges, including excessive heat, high humidity, and heavy rainfall. For this reason, the time has come to build a dedicated space with indoor facilities where our participants can continue to thrive year-round.

To expand the recreation activities available at The Els Center of Excellence campus and to provide individuals with autism with a full range of recreation choices, Els for Autism announced the official launch of its Capital Campaign to build a Specialized Autism Friendly Recreation Complex. This building will be a replicable model, ensuring that individuals impacted with autism worldwide have access to specialized autism friendly spaces. Having the capacity to expand our Ernie Els #GameON Autism® Sports programs, this space will support our efforts to reach Official Program Providers (OPPs) globally.

The Els for Autism Recreation Complex will be a state-of-the-art recreational facility, catering specifically to individuals with autism, providing a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment where individuals of all ages and abilities can engage in recreational activities designed to meet their needs.

*The benefits of the building include but are not limited to:*



*Improved Quality of Life*

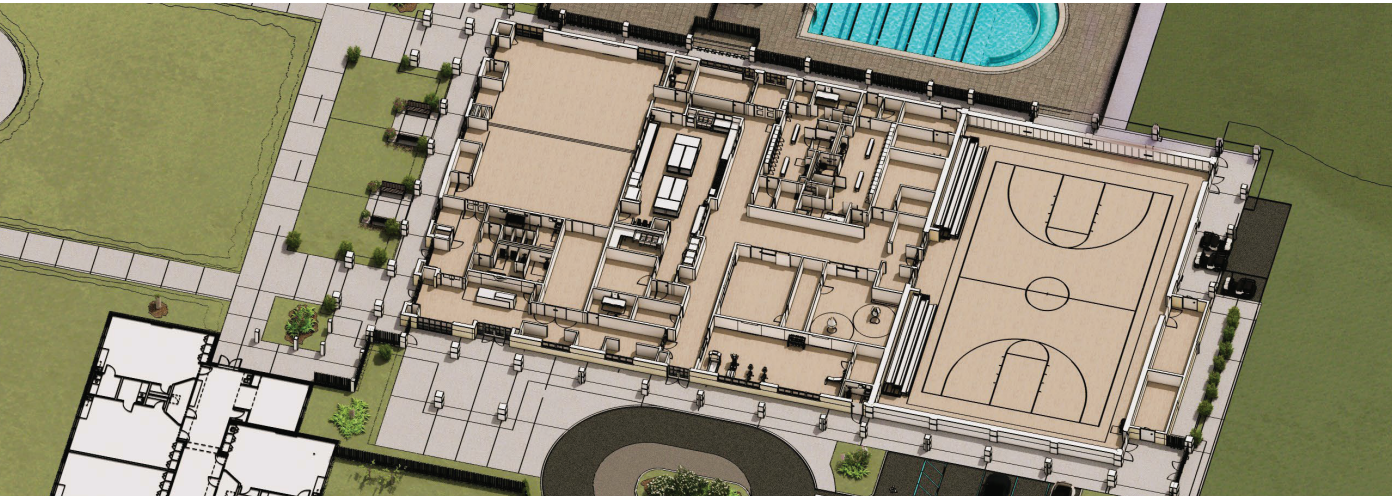


*Enhanced Community  
Support & Access*

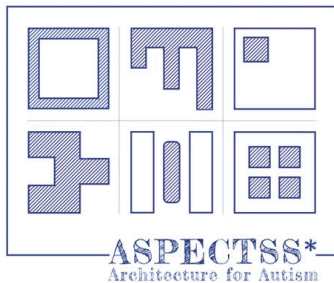


*Increased Awareness, Understanding,  
Acceptance & Inclusion*

# ASPECTSS® Principles Incorporated into the Recreation Complex Building



The Els for Autism Recreation Complex will be the first Sports and Recreation Facility in the United States to be considered ASPECTSS® Compliant. This is made possible through our collaboration with Magda Mostafa, the Founding Partner of StudioTM and the author of ASPECTSS® as an advisor through the duration of the project.



ASPECTSS® is the first research-based architectural design framework for autism worldwide. It's trademarked principles inform architecture for autism across 5 continents and it is currently taught at some of the leading architecture schools in the US- including Columbia University GSAPP, Yale School of Architecture and the University of Pennsylvania Weitzman School of Design.

## ACOUSTICS

*The strategic use of specially designed materials to reduce echoes and limit noise transfer between spaces.*

## SPATIAL SEQUENCING

*An organization of the spaces and rooms of the building to flow in a predictable manner.*

## ESCAPE SPACES

*For sensory respite and regulation, these are from within a space and allow for needed sensory regulation without isolation from social activities and engagement with the group.*

## COMPARTMENTALIZATION

*A logical subdivision and organization of spaces to limit sensory overload and distractions.*

## TRANSITION SPACES

*In a gradient of sensory opportunity and level of enclosure, transition spaces allow preparation prior to entering activities*

## SENSORY PERCHES

*Intended to help support predictability, planning, comfort and reduced anxiety prior to engaging in gym activities*

## SENSORY ZONING

*An organization of the design of the building in a manner that clusters quiet activities away from high sensory stimulation areas*

## SAFETY

*The building is organized with a single main entry point to allow maximum supervision, with controlled exits with clear sight lines and double control points leading to the water area.*



# Stanley Black & Decker GYMNASIUM

People impacted by autism, of all ages, need to participate in daily exercise. South Florida can experience months of inclement weather including excessive heat, high humidity, and heavy rainfall. The Stanley Black & Decker Gymnasium will be an indoor, air-conditioned space that will provide year-round use for recreational activities including basketball, kickball, yoga, and other fitness programs.

“The purpose-built gymnasium will be a sensory-friendly, stress-relieving, and welcoming place to mitigate hypersensitivity to bright lights and loud noise, for those who are nonspeaking and have a difficult time socializing,” said Dr. Marlene Sotelo, Executive Director. “Keeping our participants healthy through learning about nutrition and other well-being programs, and being active through tennis, fitness, golf, kickball, and yoga is our goal.”

Els for Autism staff believes recreation activities, specifically sports and fitness, can be an effective supplemental therapy for individuals with autism. Our programs incorporate activities to target coordination, balance, hand-eye coordination, and gross motor skills while also practicing social/communication skills. We utilize a variety of traditional and adaptive fitness equipment, and we integrate FUN into each program to keep our participants motivated.

“Since starting the Els for Autism Foundation programs and services in 2015, it has always been our vision to provide the autism community with a robust offering of sports, fitness, arts, leisure, and healthy living programs,” said Liezl Els, Founder and Managing Director. “Our clients and families deserve a Recreation Complex, so let’s get it built!”

*In the U.S., the prevalence of obesity among children with autism increases by 19% with an additional 36% at risk for being overweight. Being overweight can put children at increased risk for numerous health problems, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, bone and joint problems, and even depression.\**

*\*Healy et al., 2018*



# The AQUATIC CENTER

*Naming Opportunity: \$2,500,000*

The Aquatic Center will be a multipurpose facility consisting of a splashpad and pool with regulation size lanes, an area for aqua therapy, swim and water safety lessons, and fun water play activities designed to serve individuals with autism, their families, and the broader community. Drowning is the number one cause of death for autistic children, with Florida reporting the highest number of deaths among this population. In the summer of 2024, a study conducted by the Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County revealed that Palm Beach County, where the Els Center of Excellence campus is located, leads the state in drowning incidents involving children with autism.

Given that South Florida is surrounded by water and many homes, community centers, and public places have pools, lakes, ponds, canals, or other bodies of water, wandering (also known as elopement) poses a significant safety risk for individuals with autism.

Our team is currently expanding the Ernie Els #GameON Autism Sports program to include aquatics. This new aquatic program will provide a specialized curriculum for teaching swim lessons and water safety in our aquatic center pool. Once the curriculum is finalized, it will be made available globally, enabling individuals, organizations, and businesses to become Official Program Providers of the Ernie Els #GameON Autism Aquatics program and offer this lifesaving initiative in their communities. In addition, to the pool, the Aquatic Center will have an interactive splash pad to allow for individuals to play independently with various water features without the worry of entering a pool where swimming will be necessary.





# The SPLASH PAD

*Named by Thomas R. and Deborah K. Whitesell*

Including a splash pad in the Aquatic Center allows individuals who cannot swim, choose not to swim, or fear immersion in the pool to enjoy water experiences and have opportunities for social interactions while feeling safe and secure. The Splash Pad will be a place to have **FUN** with water on a hot day.



*Drowning is the number one cause of death for autistic children*

*From January 2012 to August 2024:*

**130**  
children with autism  
drowned in Florida

**83%**  
of those drownings  
were boys

**58%**  
of those children were  
between the ages of 3-5

*Source: Children's Services Council Palm Beach County*



*Help us reach our goal!*

Naming opportunities within the Recreation Complex are available as are In-kind donations

Please contact the Els for Autism Development Office  
at [development@elsforautism.org](mailto:development@elsforautism.org)

Scan to learn  
more or to donate



[elsforautism.org/recreationcomplex](https://elsforautism.org/recreationcomplex)



# Ernie Els #GameON Autism Sports Programs



Through the Ernie Els #GameON Autism Sports Programs, the staff at Els for Autism strive to spread autism awareness across the global autism community. By educating professionals in the field of sports and fitness on how to teach people with autism, we are improving the culture of sports. Therefore, individuals with autism feel welcomed and included in recreational activities when they take individual lessons or group classes.

## GOLF

The Ernie Els #GameON Autism Golf Program is infused with evidence-based practices for teaching golf to people with autism. Participants learn golf skills while practicing specific autism learning concepts, including communication, emotional regulation, motor, and social skills. The goal of the program is for participants to achieve their individual golf successes, build confidence, and self-esteem in a fun, welcoming, and supportive environment.





## FITNESS

The Ernie Els #GameON Autism Fitness Program is unique because instructors not only deliver fitness instruction but also incorporate specific autism learning objectives into the lessons. Instructors teach fundamental components of fitness within the framework of structured, organized lessons with specific communication methods that allow for the effective delivery of autism learning concepts. The program incorporates the use of traditional fitness equipment, as well as music, dance, and video games as a means of motivating student participation in fitness activities. The program is focused on cardiovascular endurance, flexibility, and strength training.



## TENNIS

Ernie Els #GameON Autism Tennis Program aims to extend the reach of the Ernie Els #GameON Autism Sports Programs to provide more recreation-based options for individuals with autism. The sport of tennis teaches skills that place a greater emphasis on movement, footwork, reaction to the ball, and improving cardiovascular strength.

In addition to the Ernie Els #GameON Autism Sports Programs, recreation programs are offered in art, dance therapy, kickball, music therapy, and yoga. The programs are available to individuals ages six and older after school, during spring break and summer camp.

## Official Program Providers

*Interested in bringing golf, fitness, or tennis programs to your community? The Els for Autism organization offers various opportunities to become an Official Program Provider. **Contact [sports@elsforautism.org](mailto:sports@elsforautism.org)***

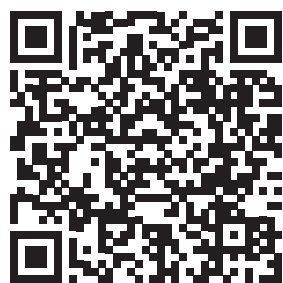




***Thank you for being a vital part of our community and helping us create a world of limitless possibilities.***

If you're interested in naming opportunities or making an in-kind donation for the Recreation Complex, please contact the Development Office at [development@elsforautism.org](mailto:development@elsforautism.org) or call **561-320-9532**. Your generosity will make a lasting impact, improving the lives of individuals with autism today and for years to come.

*Scan to learn  
more or to donate*



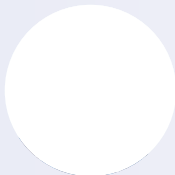


# Board of Directors & Executive Leadership

## Leadership



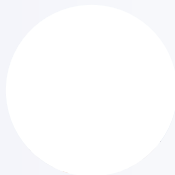
**LIEZL ELS**  
*Managing Director*



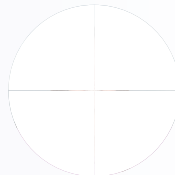
**MARLENE SOTELO**  
EdD, BCBA-D, MT-BC,  
*Executive Director*



**YVONNE D'AMELIO**  
*Chief Financial Officer*



**ERIN BROOKER LOZOTT**  
BCBA-D, CCC-SLP  
*Program Director*



**PAIGE THOMAS**  
*Director of Development  
and Marketing*

## Board Officers



**MICHAEL ALESSANDRI, PHD**  
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Executive Director, University of Miami Center  
for Autism And Related Disabilities; Clinical  
Professor of Psychology and Pediatrics &  
Assistant Chair, Department of Psychology,  
University of Miami



**STUART MAKIN**  
*Treasurer*  
Partner, Stonehage Limited



**PAMELA MINELLI**  
*Secretary*  
Co-Founder, Autism Project  
of Palm Beach County



*This year, we are honored to announce the appointment of three distinguished global leaders in business and philanthropy to the Els for Autism Board of Directors*



**DONALD ALLAN JR.**  
President & Chief Executive Officer  
Stanley Black & Decker, Inc

*New Board Member*



**ERNIE ELS**  
Founder, Els for Autism



**LIEZL ELS**  
Managing Director, Els for Autism



**GIUSEPPE CIUCCI**  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Chairman of the Board,  
Stonehage Limited



**GARY GAUBA**  
Founder and Chairman at TruU,  
Founder and MD at the CXO  
Fund, Founder and Co-Chairman  
at NextGen Cyber Talent

*New Board Member*



**PATRICK MCMAHON**  
Chief Executive Officer, Founder  
Co-Chief Investment Officer,  
MKP Capital Management, LLC



**DJ PAONI**  
Chief Executive Officer, Certinia

*New Board Member*



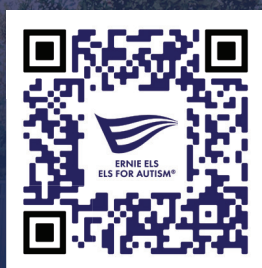
**STEVE PECK**  
SAP Global Alliance  
Relationship Leader, EY



**MARVIN R. SHANKEN**  
*Honorary Chairman*  
Founder, Els for Autism  
Publisher & Founder,  
M. Shanken Communications

## Board Members





# MAKE A LASTING IMPACT

Scan the QR Code or visit  
[elsforautism.org/recreation-complex](https://elsforautism.org/recreation-complex)

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