DULUTH, MN – The College of St. Scholastica will begin a varsity football program in 2008.

The private college’s Board of Trustees decided on Thursday to add Division III football, which will be the 19th varsity sport at St. Scholastica.

"This is in the best strategic interest of our college," said Philip Rolle, chair of the Board of Trustees. "We have researched this opportunity thoroughly and find that football is a good fit within our broader plans for enrollment management, and will be an enhancement of campus life."

St. Scholastica President Larry Goodwin noted that the new program is the latest in a series of initiatives that have strengthened enrollment and school spirit.

“We have transformed ourselves in recent years in terms of becoming a residential campus, constructing three new apartment buildings and a state-of-the-art wellness center,” he said. “Football is one more step in this process of increasing our sense of campus identity.”

The move is part of a strategic plan supporting the mission and vision of St. Scholastica, Goodwin said.

“This decision doesn’t come in a vacuum,” he said. “Enhancements of other sports programs and expansion of academic programs and facilities are in the works.”

St. Scholastica is exploring where to field the football team. “We have several good options we are investigating,” Goodwin said. "Nothing has been decided."

St. Scholastica has a traditional undergraduate enrollment of 1,985. Most of its current 18 varsity sports compete in the Upper Midwest Athletic Conference (UMAC), as will the football program.
Steve Lyons, vice president for student affairs, said Division III football will fit in well at the 94-year-old college.

“Football offers opportunities for social events involving students, parents, alumni, fans and the public on a significant scale,” he said.

The players will join a proud tradition of academic achievement by student athletes at St. Scholastica, he said.

“Historically, our student athletes have a higher GPA than the rest of the student body and persevere to graduation at a higher rate than the rest of the student body,” Lyons said. “We’ll have the same high expectations of our football players. Since we do not offer athletic scholarships, football players – like all our other athletes – will be students first.”

A St. Scholastica football task force researched for nearly a full year the question of whether to add the sport, Goodwin said. Its members included students, faculty, staff, alumni, Trustees, and friends of the College. The group, headed by faculty member Ann Leja, director of the undergraduate nursing program, voted to recommend beginning a football program.

The program is expected to bring 90 new male students to St. Scholastica.

“St. Scholastica has the capacity to serve more students in several programs that national research shows are popular with men,” said Beth Domholdt, vice president for academic affairs, “including business, computer information systems, secondary education and pre-professional majors.”

The start-up cost will be about $3.9 million, which would include facilities and hiring a coaching staff. It will be financed by bonding and roughly $1 million in fundraising, said Patrick Flattery, St. Scholastica vice president for finance.

In its third year the program is expected to generate positive cash flow, Flattery said.

Football is also expected to enhance St. Scholastica’s recruitment efforts, particularly among men, said Brian Dalton, vice president for enrollment management.

“Having football will open the door to hundreds of high school graduates who wouldn’t have considered us before,” Dalton said. Currently St. Scholastica’s student body is 70 percent female and 30 percent male.

A recent non-scientific poll by the St. Scholastica student newspaper, The Cable, found students favoring adding football by a 2-to-1 margin.