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A New Life for Historic Memorial Gym

IWU Announces Plans for \$6-Million Student Center; \$2 Million Gift from Alumnus Spearheads Project

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. It was built in the Roaring Twenties and named to honor Illinois Wesleyan University students who lost their lives in World War I. Now, historic Memorial Gymnasium, an IWU landmark for more than 75 years, is being reborn as a \$6-million student center, featuring a two-story bookstore, café, grille, information center, offices for student government and other student organizations, conference rooms, newsstand, and an outdoor patio.

A \$2-million gift from Tom O. Hansen and his family is spearheading the student-center project. It is an advance leadership gift; IWU is still seeking funding to complete the project. Hansen is a 1982 IWU business administration graduate and chief executive officer of Kentucky-based ACCENT Marketing Services. His family includes wife, Kathleen, and his children: Matthew, 8, Christian, 6, and Patrick, 3.

Hansen said: "I wanted to make a gift which benefits all students at IWU and the Student Center project was perfect. The design of the center caters to the diverse needs of all students and is very conveniently located."

The 33,000-gross-square-foot facility, targeted for occupancy in December, 2000, will be named the Hansen Student Center.

"What excites me the most about this project," said James Matthews, dean of students, "is that we're taking a building that was at the heart of the campus in the 1920s through the 1950s and bringing it back to life and we're doing this just as the university is celebrating its sesquicentennial," the 150th anniversary of its founding in 1850.

"The building offers great potential for creativity," Matthews added, referring to Memorial Gymnasium. "It's just sitting there, waiting to be exploited."

Plans for the new student center were unveiled at the Oct. 25 IWU Board of Trustees' dinner, which symbolically was held in Memorial Gymnasium.

Hansen attended the dinner along with more than 30 IWU student-government leaders.

Hansen Profiled

Hansen, who has held several high-level positions at General Electric and founded his own business, ACCENT Marketing Services, Inc., received IWU's Outstanding Young Alumni Award in 1998.

A Hansen profile in the Winter, 1998, *Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine* reported: "To form ACCENT, Hansen had to make a tough decision to leave GE, where he had spent more than 11 years in a variety of financial and marketing roles. In his speech [accepting the Outstanding Young Alumni Award], he recalled coming home to 'a wife who was pregnant four months, and had a child at her side of 15 months, and I told her that I quit my job. And my wife could have reacted by saying, 'Are you crazy? I'm going to go home to my mother!' But she didn't. What she did say to me was, 'You'd better make it work.'"

Hansen did. He was named 1998 "Entrepreneur of the Year" in the service industry for the Kentucky/Southern Indiana Region, and *Inc. Magazine* has recognized ACCENT- with its 1,000 employees and \$50 million in revenues as one of America's fastest growing companies.

Students: Sense of Ownership

The new student center, according to Matthews, "will create a space for students and students should feel a great deal of ownership in it."

That sense of ownership already was seen in the planning. During the 1998 winter break, four IWU students traveled to Williams College, Swarthmore College, Bryn Mawr College, Haverford College, and Amherst College to study their student centers. In a post-trip report, the students said those campuses were selected "based on their top five status in *U.S. News & World Report* [college rankings] in terms of retention [of students] and graduation rate.

"Understanding the details of these institutions' relationships to their student centers," the students wrote, "allowed us to come to our own conclusions about our own 'ideal center.'"

The students' report was presented to Matthews, IWU President Minor Myers, jr., and the Board of Trustees. Subsequently, Craig C. Hart, president of the Board of Trustees, requested a feasibility study, conducted by architects, to determine if Memorial Gymnasium could accommodate the type of programming students were interested in and whether it could be refurbished at reasonable cost.

Architect's Assessment

The June, 1999, feasibility study was carried out by Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott (SBRA), the Boston-based architecture firm retained to design IWU's new \$23-million library and a new sesquicentennial gateway at the corner of Empire and Park.

"Memorial Gymnasium's historic facades," SBRA concluded in the feasibility study, "and clear span structure make it an ideal candidate for renovation and adequate reuse."

Commenting on their design philosophy, SBRA added: "A successful student center should be a beacon to the entire campus community. This place should be inviting, a place to see and be seen, an information hub, and [a place] to experience what's going on at Illinois Wesleyan.

"Simultaneously," SBRA added, "the students and other members of the campus community need a place unlike the structured academic environment to 'hang out,' lounge, relax and party."

The feasibility study also pointed out that a successful student center requires at least two of three anchors: a bookstore, food service, and a post office.

IWU's student center will have a bookstore and food service. Mail already is delivered directly to residence halls and departments.

The Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees gave the green light to the project after reviewing SBRA's feasibility study.

Guiding Principles

"Several principles govern the building's design," Matthews said. "We're turning a closed and dead space into a warm, open, lively, and inviting space."

With the exception of the building's dance studio, Memorial Gymnasium has been dormant for years since activities it accommodated were shifted to the Shirk Center for athletics and recreation, which opened in 1994.

"Right now," Matthews said, "people walk around Memorial Gymnot through it. So, part of the problem we faced in designing this building is to reverse this trend and draw people into the building."

To do that, Matthews explained, we "want a building that turns itself inside out a building that opens itself up with spaces spilling onto other spaces and spilling out onto a plaza."

For example, a grille will be located on the building's lower level and likely will offer a pub-style menu. The grille, located on the west side of the building, will open onto an outdoor plaza with café-style seating.

Student Center Profile

The building's main level will feature a lobby, an information desk, newsstand, café, and a large, student "hang-out" space with trees and plants. This area will have a flexible design, enabling it to be easily reconfigured for concerts, dances, meetings, and speeches. It will have lounge-style seating and moveable furniture.

The two-level bookstore will be located opposite the building's front door on the main and lower levels. The bookstore will stock trade books, textbooks, school supplies, gifts, novelties, and sportswear. To reach the bookstore, students will pass through an area with the large lounge on the left, a café (serving coffee, pastries, and other snacks) on the right, and a newsstand/convenience store will be adjacent to the pathway.

The building's top level, a semi-circular mezzanine, will house an array of student-government offices, meeting rooms, and workspaces for student organizations. At the start of 1999, IWU had more than 88 student groups supported by \$275,000 in funding. The workspace for student organizations also will include storage space, mailboxes, and access to computers, printers, and desktop publishing.

Construction of the new student center will include replacement of all mechanical equipment—heating, lighting, and air conditioning—in the Memorial

Gymnasium, as well as windows and refurbishing of the skylight.

The building will be handicapped accessible and equipped with elevators. Parking is adjacent to the building.

Serving Students

Matthews described the many ways the new facility will serve students: "Students can come into the building in the morning and get coffee at the café. They can go to the newsstand and buy a newspaper and sit in the lounge reading it. Or, they can go to the information desk and check out a laptop computer, take it anywhere in the building and use a wireless connection to the Internet to read the *Chicago Tribune* on-line. There will be e-mail stations in the building, so they can check their mail on the way to class. And, downstairs there's the grille, where they can eat lunch or dinner or eat into the evening."

Matthews forecasts that the new student center will change IWU, relocating the center of campus farther east and north. "It will strengthen our north-south axis," he said, "especially in conjunction with the new library," which will be located on a plot in the vicinity of Empire and Park, facing Graham St.

Planning for the student center was led by a steering committee comprised of students, faculty, administrators, and trustees, as well as various constituent groups. The two-part planning process involved: developing an

ideal program based on the needs of various users and college standards, and accommodation of the program in the existing Memorial Gymnasium building.

Need for a New Student Center

The need for a new student center was an outgrowth of a task force that examined Greek-life (fraternity and sorority) issues at IWU. The task force conducted focus groups and surveys to probe student opinion about issues surrounding campus social life.

"The information collected suggested to us the need for a new student-oriented student center," said Matthews, who chaired the task force.

Memorial Gymnasium: At a Glance

IWU's Memorial Gymnasium, designed in the Neoclassical style, is an historic part of the campus. It's cornerstone was laid, Nov. 5, 1921, with construction taking place in 1921-22.

The 1921 *Wesleyana* yearbook described the facility this way; "When one enters the front doors of the new building he will be in a great hall, memorializing the soldiers of the world war . . . The gym floor will be 90 by 120 feet. The clear space in the middle will be 50 by 85, ample for basket-ball. Bleachers will be constructed around the sides. At one end there will be a gallery.

"An important feature of the gymnasium," the *Wesleyana* continued, "will be a large stage where oratorios, festivals and large meetings may be accommodated."

The stage also could be rigged for plays. Adjacent to the stage were dressing rooms and a kitchen. "By having a kitchen," the *Wesleyana* reported, "it will be possible to turn the gymnasium into a great banquet hall."

The building's initial design also included offices for men's and women's physical education directors, storage for athletic equipment, and locker rooms.

"The swimming pool will be in the basement under the stage," the *Wesleyana* added. ". . . There will probably be bleachers arranged near the pool. . . There will be a space in the basement for a bowling alley."

The facility is located at 300 E. Beecher St., Bloomington.

Athletic Fields

In other news about campus construction, IWU is continuing to develop its outdoor athletic facilities. Among projects on the drawing board are:

- Converting the outdoor track at Illinois Wesleyan stadium to a regulation NCAA facility. It will be an eight-lane, 400-meter, state-of-the-art rubberized track.
- Constructing an NCAA-regulation women's softball facility, north of the stadium, equipped with dug outs, stands, a press box, restrooms, and lights for nighttime games.
- Upgrading the stadium with handicapped and accessible seating, lights, handrails along the stairs, improvements to the press box, team meeting rooms, and dressing rooms.

Work on the softball field began Sept. 27. Track and stadium work is slated to start after the football season ends.

An anonymous donor provided funds to enhance the athletic fields.

About IWU

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 2,070 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a \$25 million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts, and a \$1.65 million baseball stadium. *Kiplinger's Personal Finance Magazine* ranks Illinois Wesleyan University 12th among the nation's top 1,600 private colleges in providing a high-quality education at an affordable cost. Also sharing IWU's rank are Princeton and Dartmouth.

Fact Sheet

New Student Center

Illinois Wesleyan University

Location: Renovation of 1920's-era Memorial Gymnasium at the northeast corner of Beecher St. and Franklin Ave.

Floors: 3 levels ("basement" is mostly above ground)

Gross Square Footage: 33,000

Net Assignable Square Footage: 21,000

Construction Cost: \$5 million

Project Cost: \$6.25 million

Status: Project is approved for construction; architectural drawings are at the design-development stage

Groundbreaking: Fall, 1999 (estimate)

Construction Time: Construction is expected to begin about Jan. 1, 2000; construction is estimated to take 12 months

Occupancy: December, 2000 (estimate)

Profile/Special Features: Bookstore, café, grille, newsstand/convenience store, "hang out"/lounge/multipurpose space, student government offices, student organization offices/workspace/mailboxes

Design Features/Materials: Existing red brick and limestone; will have new windows; fully accessible to the handicapped; complies with building/safety codes; firesafety sprinkler system; energy efficient

Parking: Adjacent to the building; existing parking lot to the East

Architect: Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott, Boston, Mass.

Engineers: BBA Engineers, Bloomington, Ill. (mechanical, electrical)

Farnsworth & Wylie, Bloomington, Ill. (civil)

Lim Consultants, Cambridge, Mass. (structural)

Contracting/Construction Management: Felmley-Dickerson Co., Bloomington, Ill., will serve as the construction manager; bids for all building components will be solicited from pre-qualified contractors