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A New Star on the Horizon

Tim Obermiller
Illinois Wesleyan University

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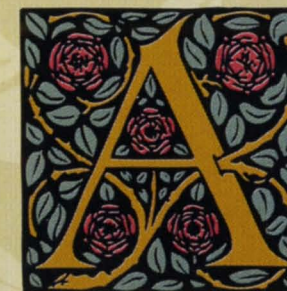
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THE AMES LIBRARY

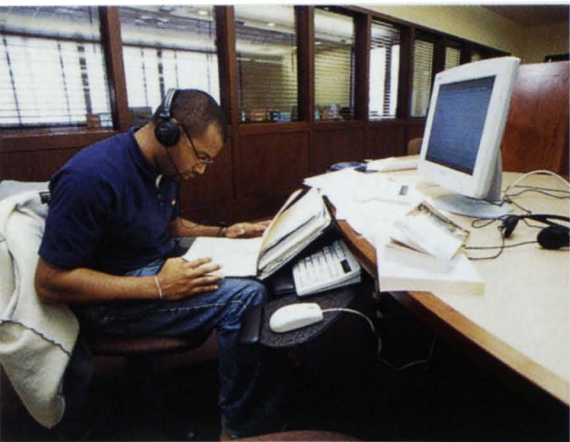
Representing an ideal marriage of form and function, The Ames Library opens for business.

By Tim Obermiller

University Provost Janet McNew recalls her first visit to Illinois Wesleyan, as an external consultant for the university's humanities' division. In trying to answer the question, "What kind of place is this?" McNew's first stop was Sheean Library. Her reaction was one of disappointment—"not only because it was small, not only because the collection was not very good, but because it didn't look like it had been conceived as a center for the community. It didn't provide an accurate reflection of today's intellectual community at Illinois Wesleyan."

Although McNew credits University Librarian Sue Stroyan and her staff for their valiant efforts to make it a viable information resource, she says that the fact remained that Sheean Library gave visitors to campus—including prospective faculty members and students—the false impression that Illinois Wesleyan was not a community that took scholarship and research seriously.

A NEW STAR ON THE HORIZON



Multi-tasker Adrian Perez '02 (above) uses electronic and printed materials for his research. Above right, painter Mike Stoutenhour applies an intricate pattern on the ceiling of the Powell Rotunda.



"It is no exaggeration to say that the faculty of Illinois Wesleyan University regards the building of a new library as the final, and finest, achievement of our evolution into a distinctive national liberal arts college." —Professor of English Robert Bray (pictured right)

When she officially joined the university's faculty in 1993, McNew found that many IWU administrators and professors shared her opinion about the pressing need to build a new library: one that could ably support Illinois Wesleyan's "community of scholars" by providing ample space for the university's growing collection as well as the technological resources that students and faculty would need for research in the 21st century.

A long-range master plan for the campus by Phoenix architect Jack DeBartolo

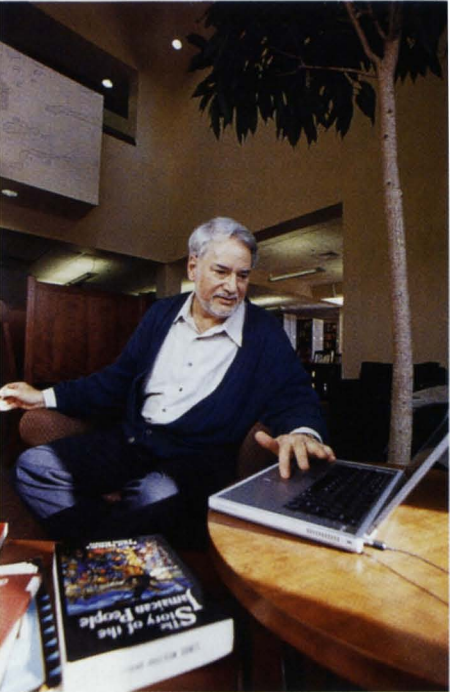
Rolling out the red carpet for opening day are Sue Stroyan and Ames circulation coordinator Bruce Chamberlain.



boldly addressed this need. The plan DeBartolo presented to IWU President Minor Myers Jr. and university trustees in the mid-1990s placed a new library just south of the main quad in a two-block area between East and Park streets. As such, it would become Illinois Wesleyan's most highly visible building, opening up a new gateway to the university on the south side of campus.

The question remained: what kind of building would this new library be? In 1996, Myers appointed a special project team—led by Associate Provost Roger Schnaitter and including McNew, Stroyan, Associate Dean Mona Gardner, and IWU Vice President for Business and Finance Ken Browning—to specifically answer that question.

Of key importance, says Stroyan, was determining exactly what the building's primary users—faculty and students—wanted to see included in a new library. Many surveys were conducted and those responses were carefully incorporated in a vision statement for the building composed by Stroyan and her staff. That statement envisioned the library as "a learning environment responding to the traditional values of a liberal arts university and to current technological advances, integrating



technology within tradition" and as "the intellectual heart of the campus...a place for interaction, collaboration, consultation, study and reflection."

This statement served as the project's north star, guiding it throughout the planning and construction phases. Says Stroyan: "I felt a very serious responsibility to hold onto that vision, because it was based on desires expressed by the library's users, and ultimately they will be the decision-makers as to whether or not this building is successful."

From Ken Browning's point of view as the project's financial overseer, another crucial factor was to build a library that would truly last. "I observed when we went into this that we seemed to be building a new library about every 30 years or so, and I was very interested in a plan that would break that very expensive cycle."

As with the two previous major building projects—the Shirk Athletic Center and the Center for Natural Science—it was decided early in the process that this would be a "quality building....And we were really willing and anxious to have it make a statement on behalf of the university. Because it is sitting at our front door, it is probably the most significant building we've constructed," Browning says.



After a two-year construction period, The Ames Library was officially opened in January 2002.

Expectations were high for the \$25.7-million facility to fulfill its role as a significant symbol of what Illinois Wesleyan aspires to be, and as a testament to what it has already become. As Robert Bray, the R. Forrest Colwell Professor of English, succinctly put it: "It is no exaggeration to say that the faculty of Illinois Wesleyan University regards the building of a new library as the final, and finest, achievement of our evolution into a distinctive national liberal arts college."

If that sounds like a heavy responsibility to place on one building, the awestruck look on visitors' faces as they enter it for the first time is just one indication that The Ames Library can easily handle the load on its broad yet elegant shoulders. With five levels and 103,000-square feet of space—more than twice as much as Sheean—the building is grand and imposing on the outside but warm, spacious, and inviting within. At Ames, a world of information is provided, but it is also presented, like a meal at a fine restaurant where food is not just consumed, but savored and enjoyed.

Public Services Librarian Lynda Duke—one of several new faculty mem-



Clockwise from top left: Cozy furniture was picked with students' comfort in mind; a glimpse at shelves of materials on the third floor shows the collection's diversity; the lighted stairwell of the front entrance is one example of the careful attention that went into construction; a video of Shakespeare's Othello was the very first item checked out from The Ames Library by Linda Zhang '02, who was assisted by library worker Jason Clark '03.

bers and staff hired to accommodate the increased services being offered by The Ames Library—describes the environment that the library's designers strove to create inside: "A tremendous amount of thought has gone into the types of seating. We have very comfortable chairs and couches. We've created intimate settings so that people can relax, get away, and find a sunny corner."

Students surveyed by Stroyan's staff also expressed a strong desire for the new library to furnish spaces where they could work together—to help each other prepare for tests, for example, or to collaborate on team research projects that are often assigned by Illinois Wesleyan's faculty. In response, The Ames Library provides 16 group-study rooms of varying size distributed throughout the building. In addition,

three project rooms are also available that contain networked computers, projection screens, and other technologies to help students plan for multimedia classroom presentations they might be asked to give.

Roger Schnaitter characterizes the library as "a big study center. It has been designed and conceived as an extremely pleasant place to be in and to spend time," he says, adding with obvious sincerity, "If I had the freedom, I think I would be over there six hours a day! It is just a wonderful place."

If not for six hours, IWU students interviewed for this story say that greater portions of their days will be spent in the new library. While Sheean's closer proximity is missed, Ames' technology, space, and comfort make it a far more alluring place to study.

THE AMES LIBRARY HAS BECOME "A GREAT SYMBOL, A VAST FLAG" OF ILLINOIS WESLEYAN.

"At Sheean, you had to fight over the computers," recalls Katrina Roloff, a third-year history major. Not only are there more computers at Ames, "but the environment is so much better that I find myself spending more time here." And, unlike in Sheean, "I don't feel claustrophobic here," she says. "There's plenty of room to spread out and not feel like you're in someone else's way."

As a third-year vocal-performance major, Peter Thoresen says he's "absolutely delighted" with the Thorpe Music & Media Center, built on the third floor to replace the old music library located in Presser Hall. "It has new listening rooms and all of the new technologies," he raves.

"I think that the atmosphere that Ames has to offer is really conducive to learning," Thoresen adds. "The lighting and the comfort make it a much more relaxed place, where the desire to study is greater."

If cozy chairs and spacious, sunny rooms provide incentive for students to walk into The Ames Library, the building's truest purpose is revealed amid the books and other materials that fill its shelves, and within computer workstations generously distributed on every floor.

One of The Ames Library's hallmarks is its perfect marriage of printed and electronic resources. This harmony was achieved despite the belief by some skeptics that paper resources such as books and journals will be swallowed up into extinction by the emergence of the Internet and other modes of electronically delivered information. Some of those skeptics even go on to suggest that campus libraries may become superfluous as students choose instead to sit in front of their dorm-room computers and travel solo on the information highway.

Minor Myers responds that anyone who's actually tried to do research exclusively through the Internet would know the weakness of such predictions. "The Internet poses the same problem as the historical movie. It tells a fascinating tale—but is it true? And the classic way to judge is to return to the scholarly, vetted books in which one group of experts looks at the work of somebody else and says, 'This will pass.'"

Indeed, one of the most important functions that The Ames Library will serve is to teach students how to conduct research by searching for credible information through a variety of media.



Above, Sue Stroyan and Minor Myers converse in the Bates & Merwin Reading Room. A special book collection will later fill the shelves. Below left, librarian Kristin Vogel enjoys her spacious new office. Overseeing the library's construction were (below right, from left) project architect John Christiansen, Physical Plant Director Bud Jorgenson, Ken Browning, Roger Schnaitter, and Sue Stroyan.



In the building's design by Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott of Boston, the presence of bountiful technology is tastefully blended with more traditional functions. "We didn't want it to look like a Microsoft campus," explains Roger Schnaitter .

Early in the process of planning a new library, it was decided that the collection would be completely reorganized in a way that would give researchers easy access to many different types of information. Instead of segregating books, journals, and audio-visual pieces like VHS tapes into different areas of the library—often entire floors apart from one another—"those materials are now merged by topic into one area of shelving," explains Associate University Librarian Kristin Vogel. "A student doing a paper on Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'I Have A Dream' speech can go to one specific area and find not only a transcript of that speech, but books and journals analyzing it in the context of King's life, as well as videos or audio recordings of this and other speeches by King."

It's the expanded space provided by The Ames Library that made this reorganization possible, says Vogel. At libraries like the recently retired Sheean, where lack of space is a dire issue, like-sized volumes such as videos or journals are grouped together to maximize shelf efficiency. Unfettered by these restrictions, Vogel says, the new library's planners were free to look at how to best organize the university's growing collection (currently at 368,317 with plans to expand to 400,000 volumes) from the researcher's point of view.

That same philosophy was applied to the scholarly workstations, described in a library brochure as "personal computers with unique functions that relate to the physical collection surrounding them." For example, one such workstation sits in the

social-sciences area of the collection, and so someone doing research in that area can sit down at one of the station's computers and find software and links to electronic journals that specifically address the needs of social scientists. "Increasingly journals are now on-line," says Sue Stroyan, "so we have over 10,000 titles that are available, full-text, electronically." Those e-journals and many other forms of electronic resources can be accessed either at the library or from home computers of members of the campus community, creating a kind of "virtual" library that coexists with the physical one.

To help students learn how to find their way through this potentially confusing world of virtual information, an Instruction Lab was set up on The Ames Library's first floor. Equipped with 26 individual workstations, the lab offers classes such as how to do an on-line search for materials available in the collection or how to look for and use electronic resources in a specific discipline. Adjacent to the lab is an Information Commons that provides access to the library's reference collection—as well as a scanner, color printer, copier, and fax machine for student use.

Indeed, technology permeates the entire Ames Library. In total, there are 110 publicly accessible computers—including five laptops for use within the building. A total of 400 open network connections allow people to plug in their laptops to the campus network from every table and desk in the building. There is also wireless networking on every floor.

In the building's design by Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott of Boston, the presence of this bountiful technology is tastefully blended with the library's more traditional functions. "We didn't want it to look like a Microsoft campus," Schnaitter explains. "We wanted it to look like a library. So we wanted the technology to fade, if you will, into a more traditional, or classic aesthetic sense."

One of the most charming aspects of The Ames Library—indeed, one of the reasons that it's among the best buildings that Illinois Wesleyan has ever constructed—is its seamless blend of form and function that is the hallmark of any truly great structure. Getting it right was the result of careful planning, but there was also a little luck involved, Sue Stroyan admits.

"I feel sorry for people who started planning their libraries in 1990, because

they had no clue what was coming in just a few years, with the advent of the World Wide Web," she says. Planning for The Ames Library "really happened at an ideal time to take advantage of the technological revolution that occurred." Of course, more changes will occur as technology progresses—for example, since the library's construction began, DVDs have replaced videocassettes as a preferred visual format.

Despite such inevitable shifts in trends, Stroyan believes that The Ames Library should be able to meet the essential needs of library users for many years to come—precisely because that is what it was carefully designed to do. "The library world changes all the time," she says, "but fundamentally what we do is provide resources for students and faculty to conduct

thing that is as fine and beautiful as this community of scholars is, and that's a marvelous thing."

Even for those who do not plan to spend much time inside it, The Ames Library has been a tremendous boost to the spirit of the IWU community, says Minor Myers, who hears excitement in the voices of everyone who talks to him about it: faculty, administration, staff, students, alumni, and even members of the Bloomington community who just happen to be walking by.

Deliberately placed in a highly visible section of the campus so that it has become the new "gateway" to this scholarly community, The Ames Library has become "a great symbol, a vast flag" of Illinois Wesleyan, says Myers.

"There was a time when steamship lines



research." At The Ames Library, that mission has been accomplished, in ways both practical and spectacular.

As Janet McNew sees it, Ames is a building "that very clearly states, 'This is who we are.'"

"One of my favorite phrases," she continues, "and one I will invoke when I talk to parents and students who are matriculating to Illinois Wesleyan, is that we are 'a community of scholars.' A library is, or should be, the most appropriate community center for an undergraduate residential college. And what we have now is some-

were elements of national pride, like the Cunard Line, which showed the status of Britain to the whole world," Myers continues. "Vessels like The Queen Mary were monuments of a civilization."

"And I think for our students, faculty, and alumni, this library really announces that same institutional pride—a sense of 'Wow, this is ours.'"

Images for this story were taken by University Photographer Marc Featherly with the exception of the two night photos of the library, which were shot by Robert George.