A Bold New Face Helps Penn State Recruit and Retain Students

THE SITUATION

For decades, the historic Recreation Hall served as the home to several Pennsylvania State University indoor sports programs, including basketball, volleyball and wrestling.

When the Bryce Jordan Center opened in 1996, taking the basketball program with it, Penn State administrators saw an opportunity to transform the building into a state-of-the-art wrestling center. The facility would meet the growing needs of the wrestling team and strengthen the University's ability to attract top talent. Renovating Rec Hall could help generate additional financial support for the wrestling program and raise its overall profile. Inspired by a growing fitness boom, administrators also envisioned a dynamic fitness facility at Rec Hall for student and faculty use.

As the project's lead architecture and engineering firm, L.R. Kimball provided an array of services that ranged from master planning and structural engineering to interior design and landscape architecture. The team brought more than 50 years of experience to the project, successfully managing the renovation of 28,587 square feet for the wrestling center and constructing a 19,794 square-foot energy efficient addition for the fitness facility.

THE CHALLENGES

With the transfer of the Penn State basketball program to the Bryce Jordan Center, the future of Rec Hall stood at a crossroads. Would the team's departure deem Rec Hall obsolete? Or would it provide an opportunity to bring the historic facility into the 21st century and successfully blend its storied past with the latest in architectural and engineering innovation?

In choosing the latter, University officials and the L.R. Kimball team were soon faced with several realities, including:

- Severely limited pedestrian access from Atherton Street, a prominent western gateway to the campus
- Obscured building entry from Burrowes Road
- Hard-to-navigate wings and corridors, the result of nondescript additions constructed throughout the years

Project Overview

CLIENT

Pennsylvania State University

GOAL

Renovation of Recreation Hall to create a state-of-the-art wrestling complex and fitness center while improving the building's overall functionality, quality and character

PROJECT INFO

- 19,794 SF additions / 28,587 SF renovations
- $14.3 Million
- Completed September 2006 LEED v2.1 Gold

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New Bold Face - View from Atherton Street

New Atherton Street Entrance

- Additions that did not contextually relate to the existing facility, including windowless brick boxes and building additions that, over time, provided an inappropriate face of the University on Atherton Street
- Strict space constrictions imposed by an adjacent research laboratory and a neighboring fraternity house
- The need to retain as much parking as possible for the research lab's operations and activities

After the team identified its primary challenges, they set to work to design an accessible, multi-use sports and fitness facility that would soon take its place as one of Penn State's premier recruiting tools for students and student-athletes.

THE SOLUTION

To begin the process, L.R. Kimball conducted strategic stakeholder workshops to verify project goals. In addition to designing a 21st century wrestling complex, project goals included:

- Design the facility as a gateway to connect the campus from east and west
- Upgrade the Atherton Street façade and create a welcoming western campus edge
- Upgrade the Burrowes Road entry to facilitate pedestrian access from the eastern campus areas
- Create a contemporary and progressive fitness center to attract and retain students, and improve student life
- Provide essential ADA-complaint parking adjacent to the research laboratory

Blending form with function, L.R. Kimball developed a comprehensive plan that included a 28,587 square foot renovation of Rec Hall for the new wrestling complex and nearly 19,794 square feet of new construction for a central atrium and fitness center. Energy-efficient green technologies anchored the plan and provided the University with a permanent opportunity to showcase its commitment to sustainability.

To achieve its goal to connect the sprawling campus, the team designed two distinct entrances, with updated east side access from Burrowes Road and new west side access via Atherton Street. The new Atherton entrance served a dual purpose. It opened up the campus to this major thoroughfare and, through the use of attractive brick paving materials, lighting, furnishings and plant materials, provided a welcome western entry point to guests and the community. The entrance, sheathed in layered glass, brick and metal, complements its surroundings by combining the modern elements found in the nearby Information and Technology building with the traditional features of Rec Hall.

The entrances converge in a new, two-story atrium that includes:

- Ample, naturally-lit space for students, faculty and guests to meet
- Prominent staircase to direct guests to the competition space, auxiliary gym, fitness center and other building sites
- Abundant signage that leads guests throughout Rec Hall

Finally, the site design team effectively and efficiently renovated areas surrounding the adjacent research lab to create 24 new parking spaces. This mitigated any concerns related to parking loss and allowed the lab to continue its work uninterrupted.

THE RESULTS

The expansive Rec Hall renovation project created a dedicated state-of-the-art wrestling complex that demonstrated the desired level of attention to Penn State's storied wrestling program - a key project goal set forth by the University during the planning process. Key features include a recruiting lounge, spectator seating, state-of-the-art sound system, a nearly 5,000 square-foot strength training facility, customer locker rooms and a multi-purpose players lounge.

In addition, the building's fitness center, described by Penn State as "the newest and most technologically equipped facility on campus," has become one of the University's most-used sites. The club-like center offers extensive fitness equipment and dedicated space for cardio workouts, stretching and strength training.

Entrance to Wrestling Complex

Wrestling Practice Room

Fitness Studio

The L.R. Kimball team incorporated a broad range of green technologies into the building design, including triple glazed, low e-glass in the fitness center that:

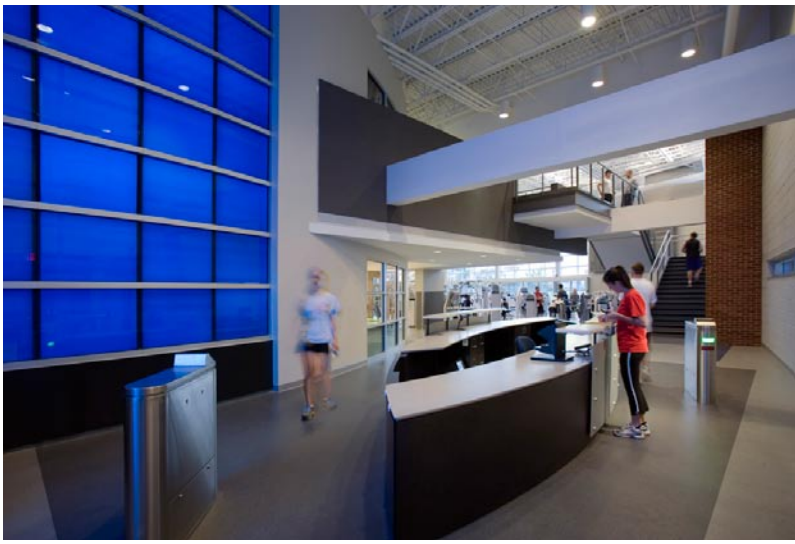
- Helped eliminate the greenhouse effect that traps heat
- Removed the need for artificial light during most of the day
- Reduced heat gain from lighting so that less cooling is required
- Eliminated the perimeter heating system usually prevalent to all high percent glass areas by preventing the interior glass surface temperature from falling below the dew point
- Increased comfort for occupants resulting from a limited effect of radiation heat loss from those working out in the facility

To further trim energy usage, the company's engineering experts implemented a robust thermal envelope which allowed them, through energy modeling, to reduce heating and cooling systems. This resulted in lower first and life-cycle costs.

Finally, L.R. Kimball's landscape architects created a site design that maintained sensitivity to the environment and existing campus elements. Site design features included:

- Reduction in impervious surfaces
- Utilization of native and indigenous plant materials to eliminate the need for irrigation
- Open green space
- Preservation of existing trees
- Installation of bicycle racks

Together, these achievements helped earn the building LEED® Gold certification in 2009.



Entrance to Fitness Center

Burrowes Road Entrance Promenade

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