

New Student Union Opens

Facility Planning Chair Pleased with Progress

The blueprint for the University's New Landscape for Learning program was devised nearly half a decade ago. But as the campus enhancement program rolls into its fourth year, the design is proving to be unusually durable, says one of its creators.

"Is the program evolving the way we hoped it would? As far as the physical buildings absolutely," says Dr. John A. Fink, a University Trustee and chairman of the Facilities Planning and



Dr. John A. Fink

Oversight Committee. "The building process has gone fairly smoothly, and that's a real tribute to my fellow trustees and Mr. Ted Curtis (vice president, capital planning and facilities management) and his staff."

Few people are as qualified as Fink to evaluate the progress of the campus building program. Shortly after his appointment to the University's Board of Trustees in 1997, Fink voiced an immediate interest in then-Chairman Alex Arshinkoff's plans to re-form the facilities committee.

"At that time, we hadn't really done any building or major construction since the polymer science building in the late 1980s. The entire board of trustees was interested in the campus. Trustee Patricia Graves and I talked at that time with President Marion Ruebel and Provost Noel Leathers about what was needed.

"Suddenly the Board asked me to serve as chairman of the committee," Fink recalls. "It was and is an honor."

The New Landscape for Learning blueprint developed during two years of analysis and planning. Fink, Graves and other trustees visited state universities, commissioned a study of the campus' needs, met with administrators, and representatives of faculty, students and the city,

and created the basic blueprint for the program. The first construction began in 2000, and since then there have been only small adjustments to the plan.



Patricia Graves

"The committee still meets and reviews programmatic problems. It's like when you're building a house of your own. At first you have this idea, then reality sets in as you realize the costs. We then

work to accomplish what we really need."

A vascular surgeon in private practice, Fink has served on the Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority Board and on Summa Health System's board during a construction campaign. His experience with other building projects leads Fink to marvel at the smooth success to date of the New Landscape for Learning program. He is particularly pleased that two particular projects are well under way.

Buildings Geared to Students

"Back when we commissioned the study, we were the only (MAC) school without a student recreation center. And our student center was a pieced-together building that had several additions," he says.

Phase One of the new Student Union opened in January, and the venerable Gardner Student Center was demolished to make way for Phase Two. Construction of the remainder of the Student Union will begin this spring. When completed next year, the entire structure will house a food court, theatre, bookstore, bank, convenience store, student organization offices, conference and meeting rooms, lounges, computer labs and more.

Meanwhile, the massive Student Recreation Center rising on the corner

of Union and Carroll streets is serving current and prospective students. Where Spicer Hall once stood, the entire campus block is now dominated by the outer frame and roof of the multi-story, 295,500-sq.-ft. complex. In addition to a recreation center, the building will include an athletic field house and an indoor varsity golf practice facility.

Construction began in April 2001, and is scheduled to be complete by May 2004.

The new facilities will join several others already in use.

The Polymer Engineering Academic Center and the East Campus Parking Deck opened in 2001, the College of Arts & Sciences building opened in 2002, and the North Campus Parking Deck will open this year. In addition, a number of remodeling and renovation projects have been completed, most notably the Auburn Science Center Library addition, E.J. Thomas Performing Arts Hall, and all of the campus' major residence halls.

More Changes to Come

Despite all this construction, Fink says the most dramatic changes of the program are yet to come.

"I don't know if anyone will appreciate how important the closing of the streets are to this plan until the roads scheduled to close are gone. It will just change this



The new two-level bookstore in the Student Union has more space and has been well received by students.



Students, faculty, administrators, trustees and representatives of the general community gathered Feb. 26 for a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the new Student Union. The event marked the formal opening of Phase One of the new facility, although the bookstore and administrative offices had been functioning in the new building since mid-January.

Gardner Student Center, which was adjacent to the new building, was demolished in the first weeks of the new year as preparation for construction of Phase Two of the Student Union. The entire facility is scheduled to be completed in Fall 2004.

campus overnight, from one with cars running through the middle of it to a much more sedate feeling in the center of campus."

The committee is now making decisions about landscaping that will add the final, dramatic flourishes to the New Landscape for Learning program. Approximately 50,000 plants, trees and shrubs will line the campus' walkways, fill its flowerbeds, and define its borders with the city and surrounding neighborhoods.

"Once we're done, there's going to be much more of a true, collegiate atmosphere on campus," Fink says. "I think students will really enjoy it." ■