

# Student Union Update

**Students Play Vital Role in Renovation of this Campus Icon**

If you have visited campus in the past 60 years, chances are you made your way through the Student Union's doors. The current Student Union renovation is a drastic change, from the infrastructure to the campus life services. Not only will there be new and improved spaces across the building, but mechanical systems have been renewed and 85 to 90 percent of the building has been completely renovated.

"The goal of the Student Union is to support and advance the academic mission of the university in the life of every student," says Mitch Kilcrease, the facility's director.

When plans for the renovation were being finalized in 2008, six major principles were outlined: replace the mechanical infrastructure in place since 1951, enhance the businesses and economic engine, improve student spaces and maintain a passion for campus life, improve navigation throughout the building, modernize the interior look and do all of this while maintaining the history and legacy of the building.

The 640,000-square-foot Union, the nation's largest and most comprehensive, offers a wide variety of services and programs to prospective and current students, faculty, staff, parents, alumni and others. The facility's average day includes 7,700 visitors, totaling 1.5 million visits per academic year.

One complex but crucial effort during the renovation has been continuing book, food, hotel and student services. Maintaining electricity, gas, air conditioning and heating while many of these systems are being renewed has also been a struggle.

The new infrastructure is expected to save the university more than \$100,000 per year. The Student Union will be the only building on campus LEED certified Silver for energy efficiency. Nearly 93 percent of the water that drains from the roof will make its way to Theta Pond, which irrigates campus. The new building will use an average of 45 percent less water, saving 3 million gallons annually. The addition of three vertical-axis wind turbines will produce enough energy to power 10 average households per year.

While these modern improvements will have significant advantages, one of the main priorities of the renovation was to



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embrace the legacy of the original Student Union.

"We are excited about incorporating some modern infrastructure, technology and programs that showcase the history and tradition of the original architecture throughout the Student Union," Kilcrease says. "When alumni come back there will be a lot of things they will recognize."

In 1930, President Henry Bennett laid out a master plan that would enhance the cultural, social and academic presence of then-Oklahoma A&M College. His innovative concept featured a central facility providing programs and services for the entire student body. Bennett's vision allowed the funding of a \$4.3 million project through a student self-imposed tax. The current renovations have again been led by students, who voted a fee on themselves to provide a lead gift of \$43 million.

"Students have been intricately involved in this renovation process since day one," Kilcrease says. "From design, funding, furniture and overall concepts, students have been the decision-makers."

Student Government Association representatives helped design programs to improve the community's way of life. Some members toured unions on campuses across the country.

Ashley Leonard, president of the Student Government Association, says students couldn't be more excited about returning to Student Union.

"Students have had the opportunity to play a very active role in all aspects of the renovation. The Union is going to have a very

positive impact to the atmosphere of campus, we are thrilled we had the chance to be a part of this," says the accounting and finance senior.

Students will study, eat and relax in the new campus life area. All additions are catered to the students' requests. Lounge areas will be prominent throughout the area with copy centers, email kiosks and better circulation making travel more efficient.

"We wanted to encourage this facility to be used a lot more by making this a better hang-out spot," Kilcrease says.

Food services have been reorganized with more national chains. Johnny Rockets, a full-service restaurant, has installed its first location on a college campus. Other offerings include Jamba Juice, Caribou Coffee and Chick-fil-A, one of the busiest college chains in the nation. A self-operated restaurant, Red Earth Kitchen, features ingredients from the local farming community. Baja Fresh is a West Coast Mexican concept. Bread, Deli and Beyond is a full-service sandwich and sub concept.

"The energy between retail and campus life was an important component we wanted to include," Kilcrease says.

The Student Union houses the bookstore, student retail store, Apple store and magazine shop. The new retail floor will be eye-catching with LED lights, big-screen TVs and a wider selection of apparel.

The Little Theatre has been reconstructed into a space that can also be used as an academic area in the mornings, seating more than 300 people.

The Student Union does not receive state funding for operation; students pay for the facility themselves. All proceeds support the campus in some way. Thus, funding student life at OSU is as easy as buying books and burgers.

Become a donor and join the OSU student body in renovating the heart of campus by helping us match their \$50 million commitment to these \$80 million projected construction costs. By funding the entire Student Union renovation, we ensure a continued tradition and legacy.

There are a number of naming opportunities available for donors interested in providing increased support to this campus icon. More details are available from Brenda Solomon, OSU Foundation senior director of development, at (405)385-5156 or BSolomon@OSUgiving.com.

"OSU provides a quality education at a fairly inexpensive cost," Kilcrease says. "Although our campus is good in size, you still get that small-community feeling. It's not unusual for President Hargis to walk by, say hello and know you by name. Preparing people for success is our mission and with state-of-the-art facilities like the Student Union, the community center of campus, we hope to make that dream a reality." 

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