

THE JOURNAL RECORD

Monday, Feb. 22, 2010

www.journalrecord.com

Vol. 115, No. 36 • Two Sections

FOCUS EDUCATION/TRAINING

Architecture firm has designs on education

BY DAVID PAGE

THE JOURNAL RECORD

OKLAHOMA CITY – In 2006, MA+ Architecture of Oklahoma City starting working on renderings and a feasibility study for the renovation and expansion to Ellsworth Collings Hall at the University of Oklahoma.

After a successful fundraising campaign, OU approved a project to remodel the existing building opened in 1952 and for an addition and hired MA+ Architecture for the project.

Now with the project nearing completion – faculty and staff members are expected to move in this summer and classes are expected to begin this fall – MA+ Architecture has been involved with more than 250 educational architecture projects and the sector accounts for a large part of the firm's business.

"Education accounts for about 75 percent of our business," said Gary Armbruster, a principal and architect for the firm.

Education projects include architecture and additional services for other private and state universities and public and private elementary, middle and high schools.

"We've done elementary and high schools, universities, renovations and new designs, not to mention the many projects such as gymnasiums, residence halls and administration buildings and complete campus master plans," said Armbruster.

Collings Hall has been used for OU College of Education students, faculty and staff for more than 50 years and demand for space had increased to exceed available capacity. The building also was in need of upgrades because of current technology requirements and updates for current building codes, including the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"Bringing the facility up to OU's technology standards was challenging in a '50s-era building with low ceilings and required creativity in the layout of the rooms to accommodate the additional electrical and technology required," he said.

Future technology was a consideration in the design.

"Because technology is constantly changing we have to design schools with the future in mind and make the designs as flexible as possible," Armbruster said.

Collings Hall is an example of changing architecture for education facilities.

"This is a far cry from our first educational project, which was an expansion of

the open classroom at the old New World School in Oklahoma City," said Paul Meyer, principal and architect for the firm.

Meyer founded Meyer Architects in 1968. In 2005, MA+ Architecture was formed, with Meyer and Armbruster as principals.

The original Collings Hall with 36,291 square feet is being enlarged to more than 53,000 square feet, which will bring all of the College of Education's programs into one building. The addition includes a classroom, multipurpose classroom, curriculum library, new faculty offices and new restrooms.

Challenges included designing the facility to accommodate current and anticipated technological requirements and still have the finished product blend with the rest of the campus.

"People who return to campus expect to see familiar things," Armbruster said.

The exterior of the existing building was designed as a stylized version of OU's "Cherokee Gothic" architecture. The design will allow the existing building to tie into the new addition and surrounding Cherokee Gothic facades.

MA+ Architecture's Collings Hall design includes a new courtyard.

A new wing was designed and built at an angle to the old facility. Placing the courtyard at an angle helped keep the courtyard from resembling a hallway, Meyer said.

The courtyard will be used for College of Education functions and the college's Alumni Hall of Fame.

The design of the courtyard also helps provide additional natural light for both the new and old sections of Collings Hall, Meyer said. Natural light was a major consideration in the design, which also includes larger windows than the original facility.

"There are studies that show students perform better in natural light," Armbruster said.

Another current project for the firm is remodeling and additions to Mustang High School. The \$30 million project includes remodeling five existing buildings on campus and designing a new facility. The project includes the addition of 107,000 square feet of new construction. MA+ Architecture has more than 250 sheets of drawings for the Mustang High School project.

The project, expected to be completed in late 2012, offers special challenges because of security for multiple buildings and school must go on during construction.



Paul Meyer (left) and Gary Armbruster stand in front of the courtyard at Ellsworth Collings Hall at the University of Oklahoma in Norman. COURTESY PHOTO



SWOSU Hilltop Theatre. COURTESY PHOTO

"Security is a major consideration in education projects now," Armbruster said.

MA+ Architecture also is working on expansion projects at Mustang North Middle School and Mustang Creek Elementary School, which creates additional considerations. The school district includes schools in both the city limits of Mustang, including the high school, and the Oklahoma City corporate city limits, including Mustang North Middle School and Mustang Creek Elementary School.

"We have different city codes for the different Mustang projects," Armbruster said.

Another current project is the conversion of the former Lawton High School, built in 1910 and listed on the National

Register of Historic Places, for use as the Lawton City Hall and a conference center.

A major challenge for the Lawton project is making the 17 different floor levels meet ADA accessibility regulations, Meyer said.

During his career, Meyer said he has worked on numerous education project projects around the state, including Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford. One of the more recent MA+ Architecture projects at SWOSU was the Hilltop Theatre, a new 10,000-square-foot facility completed in late 2008.

"I have worked out at Southwestern for years," Meyer said. "I did some work out there in the early 1960s when I was with another firm."