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Kent State University Builds Dorms On Historic Site

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New Dorms Honor History
While Looking To Future

By Krista Hovis, Managing Editor

The name of the school was changed again in 1935 to Kent State University when then-governor Martin L. Davey, a Kent native, signed a bill elevating the school’s status. At that time it created a graduate degree program and established the College of Business Administration. In 1947, Dr. Oscar Ritchie joined the Department of Sociology, making Kent State the first state university in Ohio to appoint an African-American to a faculty position. The school’s 10th president, Carol A. Cartwright, became the first female president of a state university in Ohio in 1991.

Another important date in Kent State University history—as well as American history—is May 4, 1970. It was on that date that four students were killed and nine more were injured when members of the Ohio National Guard fired upon demonstrators protesting the U.S.’s invasion of Cambodia during the Vietnam War. Actions leading up to this tragic event took place near Stopher Hall and Johnson Hall—two dormitories originally constructed in 1949 and 1956, respectively.

In the years since those residence halls were originally built, many changes have taken place at the university, in students’ expectations of campus living and in general architectural practices. “Many of the new buildings constructed during that era (post-World War II) are seen today as fairly institutional and unfriendly in nature,” said Michael Muse, AIA, architect/partner of The Collaborative Inc., Toledo, OH. “This was the case with the original Stopher and Johnson Halls.”
As well as giving an impersonal feel, the structure of the old buildings was not conducive to accepting new technology. Refurbishing the dorms was considered but the configuration of the existing structural and mechanical systems limited the university’s vision for the facilities. Larger rooms and private bathrooms could not be accommodated. The cost to renovate would be more than new construction costs.

New dormitories were built as the enrollment grew, further highlighting the limitations of the existing Stopher and Johnson Halls. In 1993, Stopher was closed, followed by Johnson in 2003.

DEVELOPING NEW HALLS WITH HISTORY IN MIND...

The Collaborative Inc. was selected to design the new residence halls based on State of Ohio rules for this type of project requiring a review of request for qualifications from firms, followed by interviews of those firms. The university asked the designers to create halls that had a warm and inviting residential, rather than institutional, feel. More student community space was desired so residents of the two buildings could more easily intermingle.

Many other parameters were set by the school’s May 4 University Committee. Roof heights and flat roof lines of the original structures had to be retained, as well as the footprint, siting
and lower level annex that connected the two buildings. The character of the original rear façade of Johnson Hall, which served as a backdrop for the shootings, had to be maintained, and the original brick color and pattern needed to be matched.

With those objectives serving as a basis for the design and a budget of over $34.6 million, The Collaborative Inc. set out to develop a plan that would meld the flat roof structures with the residential concept. It wanted the division of the two buildings to become blurred and have open social spaces for visual connections between residents of the two halls.

Load-bearing masonry and PC concrete plank were considered for the main framing material during the initial design phase. They were quickly dismissed in favor of light-gauge steel framing, as it was more cost effective and had a higher degree of flexibility. According to Muse, "While each structural system has its strengths, residence halls, like many higher education building types, need to be able to adapt to new technology and changing student needs in order to stay marketable. The use of load-bearing metal studs allows the owner to have relatively easy access to wall cavities and the electrical and technological infrastructure that feeds the building. In addition to easy access, metal framing systems are generally more forgiving when renovations are necessary.

"When we look back at the changing face of student housing over the past 30 years, we see that a major market change has occurred in two major areas—socialization models and technology/power needs," he continued. "It was our opinion that a metal framing
system would allow these buildings to be more adaptable as the student housing market continues to change in the decades to come.

The designers presented their concepts to the KSU Office of the University Architect for review. They worked together to incorporate the changes the university felt were necessary. "We view the design process as a collaborative effort and we see ourselves as mutual partners in that process," said Michael Bruder, assistant director for architecture, Office of the University Architect. "The Collaborative Inc. had a very talented and responsive team. We were very pleased with the services we received."

That included the light-gauge steel framing concept, for reasons other than the ones cited by Muse. Metal framing met building code requirements and allowed for exterior finish options that are more traditionally residential. The material also provided quicker erection and easier utilities installation for an even greater economic advantage.
BUILDING NEARLY ZERO-MAINTENANCE DORMS...

The project was started in the spring of 2004 with the disconnection of utilities to the existing structures, followed by asbestos abatement and demolition. Actual construction began that summer under the direction of the construction manager Gilbane Building Co., Cleveland, OH.

Acme Arsenia in Macedonia, OH, was awarded the metal framing erection contract and served as one of the prime contractors. A majority of the light-gauge steel studs, as well as the floor joists and roof trusses, were manufactured by Dietrich Metal Framing. The Steel Network provided the light-gauge shear walls.

The exterior wall assembly consisted of the light-gauge studs, fiberglass batt insulation, G-P DensGlass Gold gypsum sheathing from G-P Gypsum Corp. and Dupont's Tyvek air/moisture barrier. Owens Corning FOAMULAR 250 continuous foam insulation was applied over the moisture barrier, in accordance with ASHRAE 90.1 requirements and Ohio building codes for steel stud construction.

“FOAMULAR 250 extruded polystyrene insulation sheathing provides a continuous insulation layer over steel studs, reducing the effect of thermal bridging,” stated Herbert Slone, registered architect, technical manager commercial insulation at Owens Corning. When the joints are sealed properly, this type of assembly resists wind-driven rain and reduces reverse vapor drive in the summer, thereby reducing moisture levels and the potential for mold growth. In the winter, stud cavity temperatures are higher, thus “discouraging moisture vapor condensation,” said Slone. Together, these factors reduce the building’s overall life-cycle energy costs.

Completing the building envelope was a combination of brick veneer and an EIFS. The flat portions of the roof were covered with modified bitumen membrane.

Other sections of the roof were covered with standing seam metal roofing from Berridge Manufacturing. To stay in compliance with the May 4 University Committee guidelines, the metal roofing was only used on portions of the building that would have been originally screened from the view of the skirmish site. Kalkreuth Roofing & Sheet Metal of Wheeling, WV, installed 11,025 sq. ft. of the Dark Bronze-colored panels.
Construction was completed in the spring of 2006, with the first students coming in August of that year. The finished 76,955 sq. ft. Stopher Hall houses approximately 200 students in 100 double rooms. It has two classrooms for 30 people, a student support desk, mailroom and an office suite for the resident director and staff.

Johnson Hall measures 68,994 sq. ft. and also houses 200 students. In addition, the building contains the Kent State Honors College with an office suite for the dean and staff, four classrooms for 20 students, social lounge areas, and a library.

Both three-story buildings are co-ed, carpeted and air conditioned. Each dorm room in both halls has its own bathroom. Most of the rooms, including the bathroom, measure 11'6" x 25'. The structures have building-wide wireless internet access, study and social lounges, fireplaces, common areas, and laundry and kitchen facilities.

The building entries, outdoor public spaces and indoor social spaces are organized around a central cluster. These are arranged around the Bridge Lounge, a common social space linking the two structures at the second level. "It provides an
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Important space for flow between the buildings and a planned collision of student traffic," said Muse. Below the Bridge Lounge, just outside the entrances, is an outdoor gathering space and a new pedestrian connection to the Commons, a campus green space.

The new dorms have been a hit on campus. "Overall, I have only heard positive comments from students," stated Bruder. "The location is very central to the overall campus, making walks to classes or meals very short. For some students their classes are in the same building as their room. The new amenities are very convenient and are intended to make their new living quarters more like home.

"The administration is very proud of this project," Bruder continued. "It respects the past while clearly looking forward as an institution."

The history of the campus is honored not only in the design of the new Stopher and Johnson Halls. Several pieces of carved stonework from each of the original buildings were salvaged and installed in the new lobbies. Bruder said, "It was a way to honor the past and remember the buildings that had stood there for nearly 50 years."

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