



Tuesday, October 15, 2002

Ground broken on OC expansion project

Students, faculty, staff and friends of the university gathered Friday, Oct. 11, to break ground on an \$8 million expansion project to the **Oakland Center** (OC). With its distinctive architectural design, the expanded OC (OU's student center) will serve as an impressive new entrance into Oakland's growing campus, becoming a visible gateway to the heart of student life.

"With this ceremony, we are officially entering into the future of the Oakland Center — a future of cutting-edge student services in a state-of-the-art facility, all conveniently and centrally located," said Richard Fekel, director of the Oakland Center.

By next fall, the two-story expansion project will add 30,000 square-feet of space to the OC, including expanded seating in Pioneer Food Court, upgraded kitchen facilities, reception and study lounge areas and a 24-hour "cyber café" with non-stop Internet connection.

As part of the second-story addition, there will be a large, 7,000-square-foot multipurpose room for lectures, banquets and student functions such as dances, dinners and other entertainment. Depending on the event, the room can be sectioned off to accommodate smaller audiences, Fekel said.

"Most of us can relate to growing up in households where there was always the good living room where you were forbidden to eat popcorn, drink sodas or put your feet up on the furniture," said Mary Beth Snyder, vice president for Student Affairs. "Each fall, starting with freshman orientation, I can almost read the relief in the faces of the new students when they realize that the Oakland Center is their living room of the campus. It's the one place where they can sleep on the sofas, bang on the piano, drop pizza on the carpet, just be themselves and never have to suffer the consequences."

This expansion phase follows earlier renovations to the OC in 1997 when the food court opened and two years later when the lower level was renovated, improving space for student organizations and adding meeting rooms, recreational and office spaces. The University Bookstore also was renovated.

"As our student body continues to grow, we are focused on providing the quality infrastructure, academic offerings, technology-enhancements and student services that make the Oakland experience distinctive and unique," said OU President Gary Russi. "This capital improvement is a testament to that commitment to our students."

Following brief remarks by Fekel, Snyder, Russi, Board of Trustees Chair Henry Baskin and Rhonda Hanna, student liaison to the Board of Trustees, the group, armed with hardhats and shovels, symbolically turned the earth to launch the construction phase of the project.

The annual University Appreciation Dinner took place afterwards in the Pioneer Food Court as a wrap up to the Week of Champions at OU — a series of homecoming events, Oakland-style.

SUMMARY

Students, faculty, staff and friends of the university gathered Friday, Oct. 11, to break ground on an \$8 million expansion project to the Oakland Center. With its distinctive architectural design, the expanded OC will serve as an impressive new entrance into Oakland's growing campus, becoming a visible gateway to the heart of student life.

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