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Oakland Center design garners national recognition

By **Dawn Pauli**, contributing writer

In the year since it opened, the expanded **Oakland Center** has quickly become the campus hot spot among students, faculty and staff for its inviting design and great views. Now, the building is attracting national attention with an Honorable Mention by the Education Design Showcase, a supplement to the School of Planning & Management and College Planning & Management magazines.

"The Oakland Center national recognition helps put us on the map around the country," said Mary Beth Snyder, vice president for Student Affairs. "We hope that some of our alumni who see the honor feel proud of their association with Oakland."

DSA Architects, a member of SHW Group, designed the 30,000-square-foot expansion, which includes an additional 330 seats in the food court area; a 7,000-square-foot multipurpose room that seats 600; a 24-hour computer lounge featuring wireless Internet access; and Café O'Bears, an 80-seat coffee shop. Other construction involved extensive remodeling and updates to the OC kitchen to meet current catering and food preparation needs.

"We came up with an innovative design, and a lot of that was accomplished through the committee we developed on campus. With student and staff involvement, we worked with DSA for basic needs for the space," said Richard Fekel, director of the Oakland Center and project administrator. "We wanted it to be open and welcoming. There were specific things we had to have, and we were able to meet all of our requirements, and more."

OU's **Oakland Center** was the only student union recognized by "Education Design Showcase."

"Universities are constantly being rejuvenated. Many were built around World War II, so they're older facilities, needing lots and lots of updates," Fekel said. "I was surprised that Oakland was the only student union that was mentioned."

The Education Design Showcase awards are judged by a panel of administrators, architects and facility planners. Consideration is given to how the architect's design met the stated requirements.

"My favorite spot in the new addition is the pocket garden that joins the old with the new dining areas," Snyder said. "I hope that our students and employees find it a little island of peace in the midst of the Oakland Center daily bustle."

Oakland Center visitors agree with Snyder. Fekel said that even when there are only a few people in the building, they seem to migrate toward the garden.

"It lets a lot of natural light into the building, and it really complements the design," he said. "It's soothing in that area to sit and look at the garden."

Fekel's personal favorite area is Café O'Bears, flanked by a seven-foot wooden bear mascot.

"Café O'Bears is so relaxing," he said. "We have computers in there so students can get in there any time of day or night. I love the color combination and the view of the center part of campus. It's really beautiful over certain times of the year."

For more information on the Oakland Center, visit the **Oakland Center** Web site.

SUMMARY

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