

News Release

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Georgia Perimeter College Opens New 100-acre Campus to Replace Storefront Location and Meet Academic Needs of an Underserved Eight-county Area

First building establishes a campus architecture that blends regional vernacular with collegiate permanence

COVINGTON, Ga., March 21, 2008 – Students residing in Newton, Rockdale, Morgan and five other Georgia counties that previously were academically underserved by a public institution of higher learning, are enjoying a new, 100-acre community college campus that replaces an east-of-Atlanta storefront in a former shopping plaza.

Georgia Perimeter College (GPC), a metro Atlanta multi-campus, two-year college that is the third largest institution of the University System of Georgia, opened the doors to its new campus in Newton County's city of Covington last summer with the first building, a 104,000-square-foot structure. Building 1 is a flexible, all-in-one campus facility, designed to enable some of its functions to move to other buildings and others to expand as the Newton Campus grows. Construction on a second student service-focused building began in December, and school officials anticipate it will be ready for classes at the start of spring semester 2009.

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Lord, Aeck & Sargent served as the design architect for both phases and as architect of record for the first building. The Architecture Group served as associate architect on the initial phase and is architect of record for the second phase. Lord, Aeck & Sargent – in collaboration with The Architecture Group; Paulien Associates; and Hughes, Good, O’Leary & Ryan – led the campus planning effort for developing architectural strategies for the overall campus master plan.

“GPC Newton is the result of many years of planning to meet the educational needs of eight counties about 30 to 50 miles east of Atlanta,” said Lewis Godwin, RA, director of campus planning and projects for GPC. “These are among some of the fastest growing counties in Georgia, and the University System of Georgia had no significant academic offering for the increasing population.”

Godwin, who was involved in the genesis of the Newton Campus from site selection and master planning through building construction, said that 2007 summer school enrollment of 1,045 was GPC’s largest ever summer enrollment in the area. Fall enrollment of more than 2,000 students exceeded enrollment of 1,600 at the old Rockdale Center storefront location in Rockdale County’s Conyers, Georgia. “We have also seen a significant increase in average credit hours and in equivalent full-time students, which means that GPC Newton students on average are spending more time on their education,” Godwin said.

Campus master plan is sensitive to the environment

Godwin noted that a goal of the Newton Campus master plan was to preserve the property’s wetlands and its many specimens of oak and hickory trees. The master planning team achieved the goal, designing a long, winding road – lined by many large trees and other vegetation – that allows the campus to unfold visually while keeping respectful distance from the

site's most fragile ecosystems. Building 1 is sited sensitively to take advantage of the rolling topography and overlooks the preserved wetlands on two sides, providing students and faculty with wonderful views of the natural environment.

"The campus master plan can be sustained for a long time," Godwin said. "As the Newton Campus grows, there will be no flattened hilltops and no mowed down trees, and that's one of the things I like best about our new location."

GPC Newton's 100 acres are adjacent to an additional 450 acres that will become the new town of Mt. Pleasant, conceived as part of a larger regional plan done by Hughes, Good, O'Leary & Ryan.

"In planning the Newton Campus, the team designed the road leading up to the campus through a wooded area in such a way that the campus gradually reveals itself. The road winds its way to the signature greenspaces of both the campus and the new town. Here, the town and campus meet right in the center," said Joe Greco, AIA, the project design principal. "Our intent in creating the lawn as we did was to truly link it directly with the proposed new town square, in effect using planning strategies and the architecture to create a campus gateway."

First building sets architectural direction

"GPC Newton's first building was intended to establish the architectural direction for future campus buildings," Greco said. "We wanted a strong sense of permanence, so we strove for a timeless design that would respect the Southern vernacular tradition in the area and that somehow also drew from the history of great collegiate architecture.

"The architecture is evocative of historic buildings without being a specific copy of a particular historic style, so it's also contemporary and of its own place and time," Greco continued.

The building is clad primarily in red brick – reminiscent of most southern collegiate architecture. The facility is designed with a strong, durable base of rough-hewn granite, salvaged from nearby Elberton, Georgia. The brick skin is articulated with cast stone lintels, window sills and belt courses that mark material changes. Cast stone columns create the great porch that fronts the lawn, and a Craftsman-inspired shingle-clad upper cornice zone with decorative brackets supporting the silver metallic roof – like those traditionally found on Southern farmhouses – relate the building to its location and give it a clear sense of base, middle and top. The standing seam metal roof is topped with a large “chimney” that consolidates and gives architectural form to the exhaust stacks needed for the building’s teaching laboratories without overwhelming the building with its presence. At the front entry, curved bench-width steps and the grand porch, sized to accommodate tables outside the foodservice area, allow students to sit and eat while they socialize and look out onto the great lawn.

The building also features an atrium space in the “tower” that marks the gateway into the campus. Large windows and upper clerestories in the tower bring in a great deal of natural daylight and along with a dramatic suspended public staircase, help enliven the space at all hours for dining, study and lounge use.

“The architects took cues from the architecture of the area – the pitched roof, for example – and created a vocabulary for the campus that has just the right feel,” Godwin said. “It’s nice to hear visitors’ reactions to and their surprise with the quality of what we’ve done. It’s a very cost-efficient building, but it doesn’t feel cheap at all.”

A flexible interior

The architects designed Building 1 to be flexible so that some of the functions of the current all-in-one campus can move as more buildings are added. Currently, the three-story facility houses

35 high-tech classrooms; 10 computer classrooms; six teaching laboratories for biology, chemistry and physical sciences; a library; a tutoring lab; a testing center; a one-stop area with an academic advising center, an enrollment and registration center, a financial aid office and student accounts; faculty and staff offices; a bookstore; and an area for student government and student life activities. In addition, the main level of the tower atrium offers a foodservices area, and the upper levels contain a variety of spaces for students to study, eat and socialize.

“One of our goals in designing the interior space was to create informal gathering places to encourage students to mingle and stay on campus instead of going home directly after classes,” Greco said. He noted that there are two public staircases, the open one located in the tower atrium and another at the far end of the building that provides a 270-degree view of the wetlands.

Building 2, when completed, will face the first building across the great lawn and its gateway piece – the tower – will be a mirror image of Building 1. Functions that will move to Building 2 include the library, which will occupy the top level of the tower and a full wing of the third floor, the testing center, the tutoring lab and student life offices. Building 2 also will house a fitness center, classrooms and a larger auditorium that will foster community involvement. And, Godwin said, “Students are hanging out in droves in the Building 1 atrium, just as we planned, so the Building 2 atrium will also have plenty of casual living space for the same purpose.”

A public-private partnership

Funding for the Newton Campus came through a variety of community sources that comprise a public-private partnership. The 100 acres of land was a gift to the Georgia Perimeter College Foundation (GPCF) from The Arnold Foundation. Phase 1 included \$5 million for site

development and \$20 million for the campus master plan and Building 1. The State Department of Transportation funded development of the road leading up to the campus, and the Newton County Commission provided the remainder of the site development funding. Wachovia Bank financed the construction of Building 1, which GPC is leasing from the GPCF for instructional use, with options to renew for a total of 25 years, at which time the building will be gifted to the State of Georgia and the University System of Georgia's Board of Regents.

Phase 2, which is Building 2, is an \$11.225 million project being funded – along with multiple student-focused projects on multiple GPC campuses – through a student support fee that will retire the debt. The fee is \$10 per semester hour up to a semester limit of \$120.

The Project Team

The project team for Building 1 of the GPC Newton campus comprised:

- Lord, Aeck & Sargent, Inc. (Atlanta), lead architect
- The Architecture Group, Inc. (Atlanta), associate architect
- Hughes, Good, O'Leary & Ryan (Atlanta), landscape architect
- Nottingham, Brooke & Pennington Engineers (Macon, Ga.), MEP/FP engineer
- KSi/Structural Engineers (Atlanta), structural engineer
- Horizon Engineering, Inc. (Atlanta), and Estes Shields Engineering, Inc. (Atlanta), civil engineer
- Waveguide Consulting (Atlanta), AV and acoustics consultant
- Camacho Associates Inc. (Atlanta), foodservice consultant
- Potts General Contractors Inc. (Conyers, Ga.), construction manager
- Carter (Atlanta), program manager

The Building 2 project team is the same as for Building 1, except that: The Architecture Group is the lead architect; Lord, Aeck & Sargent is the associate architect; and Horizon Engineering, Inc. is the civil engineer.

About Lord, Aeck & Sargent

Lord, Aeck & Sargent is an award-winning architectural firm serving clients in scientific, academic, historic preservation, arts and cultural, and multi-family housing and mixed-use markets. The firm's core values are responsive design, technological expertise and exceptional service. Lord, Aeck & Sargent has offices in Ann Arbor, Michigan; Atlanta; and Chapel Hill, North Carolina. For more information, visit the firm at www.lordaecksargent.com.