News Release

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New Home for Presbyterian College Biology Department Harmonizes With Campus' Georgian Architecture

Lord, Aeck & Sargent designs building that fits in while integrating elements required by science buildings

CLINTON, S.C., June 16, 2008 – The faculty and students in Presbyterian College's (PC) biology department are elated with their new home, a 28,600-square-foot building that houses teaching and research laboratories, faculty offices and generous interaction spaces. Lassiter Hall, which was occupied in February, is a $12 million expansion project that adds a two-story wing to the private liberal arts college's Richardson Science Hall.

Completed in 1964, Richardson Hall housed the college's biology, physics and chemistry departments, and faculty and students were crammed into smaller laboratories, each used for teaching a variety of courses. Lassiter and the ongoing renovation of Richardson comprise the first phase of a two-part project. The next phase will be the construction of a new wing that mirrors Lassiter and will house teaching and research space for the chemistry department.

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Harmony with PC's Georgian architecture

Lassiter Hall was designed by the Atlanta office of Lord, Aeck & Sargent. "We challenged the architects to create a 21st century facility that would be true to the Georgian architecture on campus and blend harmoniously with every building," said David Walker, director of campus services at PC.

"We wanted the building to look like it belongs and has been there for a while, so we took pains to match the color of the brick and the cast stone and window details with those of Richardson," said Amy Leathers, a Lord, Aeck & Sargent senior associate who was Lassiter Hall's project designer.

"It was also a challenge to work within the classical architectural language of the campus while integrating the elements required by science buildings," Leathers continued. To meet the stringent ventilation and exhaust requirements for a science building, Lassiter was designed with a series of 12 roof dormers for air intake, and exhaust ducts were concealed in four double chimneys matching the details of Richardson's chimneys.

"In determining the number of roof dormers and chimneys needed, we looked toward the future when the new chemistry wing will be connected to the other side of Richardson. From our experience designing science buildings, we knew that chemistry labs have greater intake and exhaust requirements than biology labs. We also knew that PC wants the chemistry wing to duplicate Lassiter's exterior. So we designed Lassiter with more dormers and chimneys than it actually needs," Leathers said.

A unique and exciting landmark gathering space

According to PC's Walker, another major challenge for Lord, Aeck & Sargent was to design a connector between the existing building and the new addition that would be "a unique space where people would want to gather, both inside and outside."

"We looked at the challenge as an opportunity to create something warmer, more welcoming and less institutional than is typical of science buildings," Leathers said.

The resulting connector is actually a bridge that joins Lassiter's and Richardson's second floors, with an arched brick breezeway underneath. A main pedestrian walk runs under the breezeway and parallel to Lassiter. The connector, which is treated as an enclosed porch, has pre-finished wood floors, comfortable seating and large expanses of glass overlooking the campus quad on one side and a formal garden on the other.

"The connector's inside and outside spaces have become two of the most popular on campus," said Dr. John Griffith, PC president. "It's a unique and exciting landmark space that fits in and that people are attracted to and will remember."

Maintaining Richardson's prominence

Richardson Hall, which is prominently located at one end of the campus quad, is larger than the Lassiter wing, has a front porch and columns that give it a three-dimensional appearance.

"Because of Richardson's size and location, we wanted its front door to maintain prominence, so while we matched Lassiter's door to Richardson's, we made it smaller in deference to Richardson, and we omitted a porch and columns," Leathers said.

"At the same time," she noted, "Richardson does not have a lobby, so we designed Lassiter with a two-story formal entry space."

The space is graced by a 750-square-foot ceiling mural titled, "The Spiral of Life." An iconic representation of the origin and the biology of life, it is laced with a DNA spiral connected and intertwined with the plant and animal kingdom, indicating the development of living things ranging from bacteria to highly evolved mammals. The mural was designed and painted by Brenda Mauney Councill, renowned for her excellence in the specialty of large-scale murals, trompe l'oeil and narrative paintings.

The lobby also features a terrazzo tile floor and a glass exhibit case topped by the skull of a Tyrannosaurus rex. Niches along the walls are for putting science on display, and one niche is a glass window that provides a view of an aquarium and through it, a look into one of the labs.

The program

In addition to the lobby, Lassiter's program includes six general teaching labs for subjects such as botany, plant taxonomy, parasitology, zoology, anatomy, paleontology, genetics, microbiology, physiology and biochemistry; a life sciences core lab; a wet lab; three preparation labs; four student/faculty research labs; and nine faculty offices.

"The students and faculty have been elated to be in the new facility," Walker said. "Faculty members like the convenience of features such as the deionized water system, the flexibility of the space and the improved safety systems. The students are no longer crammed into smaller classrooms, and the professors don't have to use the same labs for teaching unrelated subjects, so they can spend more time teaching and less time worrying about logistics."

"Preliminary indicators show that Lassiter Hall is playing a positive role in recruiting students," Griffith added. "It is a much needed facility for delivering the academic program that is central to our core mission, and by strengthening our core sciences it also should help us to succeed in our planned endeavor to launch a pharmacy school."

The Project Team

The project team for Lassiter Hall comprised:

- Presbyterian College (Clinton, S.C.), owner
- Lord, Aeck & Sargent, Inc. (Atlanta), architect
- Seamon, Whiteside (Greenville, S.C.), civil engineer and landscape architect
- Newcomb & Boyd (Atlanta), MEP/FP engineer
- Uzun & Case (Atlanta), structural engineer

- Triangle Construction Co. (Greenville, S.C.), construction manager
- Brenda Mauney Councill (Atlanta), lobby ceiling trompe l'oeil artist

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.

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