

News Release

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Contact: Anne Taylor Carros
Lord, Aeck & Sargent
404-253-6710
acarros@lasarchitect.com
or
Ann Kohut
Kohut Communications Consulting
770-913-9747
annielk@bellsouth.net

Students, University and Historic Downtown are Winners With New Buildings

North Georgia College & State University's rapid growth drives design & construction of six new student life facilities, renovation of an historic mid-20th century modern

DAHLONEGA, Ga., Dec. 9, 2011 – It's a win-win-win situation: College students receive an upgraded student life experience; the university they attend continues supporting enrollment growth and improving retention through accommodating more students living on campus; and the university gets two attractive new public faces that knit together its campus with the historic downtown community in this small north Georgia mountain town.

All of this is the result of the addition of new student housing – both military and civilian, both new and renovated – a signature new dining hall, structured parking and a mixed-use facility on the [North Georgia College & State University](#) (North Georgia) campus.

The buildings, designed by architecture firm [Lord, Aeck & Sargent](#) (LAS), are part of a \$69.85 million, two-phase public/private venture financed through the sale of municipal bonds by the North Georgia College & University Real Estate Foundation. Debt service repayment is coming from fees paid for by the use of the buildings. [Ambling University Development Group](#) is the developer, and [Choate Construction](#) is the general contractor.

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Construction began on the first of these seven student life facilities in October 2009. Five of the buildings along with a parking structure have been completed, and the final – an exterior restoration and interior renovation of an historic mid-20th century modern structure designed by architect Richard Aeck, founder of Aeck Associates, a predecessor firm to Lord, Aeck & Sargent – will be ready for occupancy in August 2012.

According to Jeff Davis, North Georgia's associate vice president for facilities, the building project originated from the need to house and feed North Georgia's rapidly growing enrollment, which has increased from 5,500 students in fall semester 2008 to more than 6,100 in fall 2011.

"With such rapid growth, a decreasing percentage of students were able to live on campus, and we wanted to preserve North Georgia's traditional residential college experience," Davis said. "To compound matters, North Georgia is one of only six senior military colleges in the United States, and we couldn't grow our Army ROTC cadet corps without more military housing, which is a required component of the cadets' leadership development and training."

Design Challenges

Because the gold rush town of Dahlonega and the North Georgia campus are nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge mountains about an hour's drive northeast of Atlanta, topography represented LAS' biggest design challenge.

"The site of every new structure had a significant amount of topography to contend with," said Joe Greco, president of Lord, Aeck & Sargent and principal in charge of the project.

Greco noted that it was also a challenge to design buildings that would fit in contextually with some 50 others on campus.

“The campus architecture at North Georgia runs the gamut in terms of style with a rich history of facilities built in different eras dating back to the 19th century. But most of the buildings are red brick with light-colored trim and accents, and none are over four stories, so scale is consistent, but otherwise their styles vary.”

Dining Hall presents topographic, contextual and siting challenges

In terms both of topography and contextual design as well as siting, one of the most challenging of the buildings was the new Dining Hall. The facility was completed and opened in August, replacing an old and outdated campus dining hall in a different location.

“With so much new housing and the demolition of some of our older dorms, our center of housing mass shifted, and we needed our new dining facility to be centered among all campus housing,” Davis said. “The site that was ultimately chosen is compelling because of its centrality.”

The site, at the head of North Georgia’s historic drill field, supports the need for a student gathering place. “Because it replaced an old residence hall between another residence hall and a science building, we were careful to maintain the scale of buildings surrounding the Drill Field, keeping the roof eave line at about the same level of the buildings on either side. The scale and overall material usage on the facility are contextual, but the Dining Hall is also very contemporary and forward-looking, and it clearly defines the head of the Drill Field, framing the view across it with two vertical tower elements connected by an open air porch,” Greco said.

Located on a full-story, 20-foot slope with main entries on both the lower Drill Field side and the upper Main Street side, one can actually walk from the public sidewalk directly onto the roof terrace of the 36,860-square-foot building. The terrace is an open air porch that connects the second floor banquet room and upstairs dining room and provides an expansive view of the North Georgia mountains.

Clad in red brick with cast stone accents, the Main Level Dining Hall space features a curved glass curtainwall that affords wonderful panoramic views across the Drill Field and beyond toward the campus library.

The Dining Hall has seating for more than 900 students in a variety of spaces, including the large main dining space, an upper level, streetside diner-style eating zone and an area for club meetings. The banquet room is connected to a more intimate Presidential Dining Room. Together they comprise 3,000 square feet and can be used together to seat up to 240 in banquet setup.

“The Dining Hall is really a magnet for activity at the head of the campus, the linchpin between academic space and all of the on-campus housing,” Greco said. “It supports the need for a common gathering place, and we think its location, program and food offerings will transform the experience of going to school at North Georgia.”

Military and civilian housing programmed with different character

To be harmonious with the other buildings on campus, both Patriot Hall, the first of the new residence halls for cadets, and North Georgia Suites, the new civilian residence hall, are clad in brick – primarily red – with board and batten cladding on their upper floors. But in many ways, the similarities end there.

“We wanted to create a different, unique character for the military and civilian housing,” Greco said.

To that end, Greco noted that LAS programmed Patriot Hall with the university military structure in mind. The building itself is akin to a “battalion,” with each floor housing a “company.” Each company has four dayrooms, one for each “platoon” of cadets. The four-story, 87,124-square-foot suite-style building houses 352 beds. Liberty Hall, which is Patriot’s 65,343-square-foot counterpart, houses 264 beds in three stories.

Rounding out the military housing will be the renovation and exterior restoration of Gaillard Hall, the historic mid-20th century modern residence hall designed in the 1950s by Richard Aeck, and a new Cadet Plaza linking Gaillard with Patriot and Liberty halls and unifying the military housing district with a shared formation space.

The renovation of the 48,000-square foot, three-story Gaillard Hall provides 166 beds and will transform the traditional dorm style room accommodations to a suite style equivalent to Patriot and Liberty. All three provide the cadets with the same amenities.

Greco noted that the team worked hard to preserve Gaillard's historic exterior, which although in good shape still needed repair. "Through this significant restoration/renovation project, we're giving a historic building another 50-60 years of life."

Unlike the military housing, North Georgia Suites, the new civilian residence hall, features a less rigid organization, with each floor programmed into three "neighborhoods" to help build student communities.

North Georgia Suites features two C-shaped buildings unified by an elliptical two-story lobby that serves as a joint community area with shared social areas, kitchens and media, game and pool rooms. The lobby features a granite stone fireplace and great views of the mountains through its front and back floor-to-ceiling glass entries.

Because the site of the 147,347-square-foot, 604-bed North Georgia Suites has significant topographic fall, the buildings step down three levels, integrating with the steep north Georgia terrain.

Parking deck "tucks itself into the hillside"

North Georgia's Davis said that although the university is a traditionally residential campus, its rural location with no mass transit has resulted in close to a 1 to 1 ratio of students to

cars, thus resulting in the need for a new parking structure to complement increased residential enrollment. LAS selected a well screened lower plateau located close to the North Georgia Suites in order to best serve the first student housing on the west side of campus.

Once again faced with a steep slope – this time six stories high – the design team created a six-story, 1,069-space structure with its upper level joined to the North Georgia Suites streetscape by a bridge, and its lowest level opening onto an improved Walker Drive and links directly to West Main Street. Known as the Walker Drive Parking Deck, it is clad in red brick and precast concrete with red brick vertical elements.

“We were able to find a perfect site for the deck where the steep topography was extremely advantageous,” Greco said. “It just sort of tucks itself into the hillside.”

Mixed-use building integrates campus with historic downtown

The Chestatee Building is perhaps the most significant of the new North Georgia buildings from the perspective of linking the university to the City of Dahlonega. Completed and occupied in August, the three-story, 48,000-square-foot mixed-use building integrates the campus with Dahlonega’s downtown, with its historic square only a block away, and provides the university with a new public face.

“Prior to the construction of Georgia State Route 400 some 30-plus years ago, visitors to Dahlonega arrived from the west, where they would experience an elegant campus arrival moment and view some of the most attractive North Georgia buildings,” Davis said. “But once the highway was completed, the arrival was on the more utilitarian side of campus; visitors were greeted by building elements never designed to be our front door. So we wanted to upgrade the visitor experience by knitting together the campus and downtown.”

Presented with this design challenge, the LAS team studied the architecture of the historic town square to create a contextual gateway to downtown that also announces the campus presence.

“We looked at the buildings in historic downtown Dahlonega to inform our design,” said Frank André, project designer. “A particular influence was Hall’s Block, a substantial red brick 19th century general store as well as a number of wooden Victorian commercial buildings on the square. The final design of Chestatee Building marries a number of the indigenous elements, interpreting them into a more contemporary architectural language. The building is primarily clad in cleanly detailed red brick with a natural granite base inspired by the Hall Block. Large proportion window bays and a public porch element reminiscent of the local Victorian precedents help create a welcoming feeling. Because the project had such a substantial public face, the design team worked with the Dahlonega Downtown Development Authority to ensure that the project was in keeping with the recently developed Downtown Master Plan.”

Like all of the projects, the Chestatee Building needed to deal with the challenging topography with a site that had a 20-foot grade change from north to south. LAS used this as an opportunity to create a more functional and more appropriate two-story scaled building facing downtown with an entrance at the middle level. A three-story façade facing the campus with an entrance at the lowest level likewise creates a compatible scale for the university. “The two façades relate but are subtly differentiated from one another, with the more historic downtown façade and a slightly more contemporary campus façade in keeping with the existing North Georgia architecture,” André said.

The Chestatee Building houses the campus bookstore and branded coffee shop inside, the North Georgia student infirmary, admissions offices for cadets, undergraduates and graduate students, and other office space as well as 6,000 square feet of street-side retail space.

Summing things up, Davis said, “All of the new North Georgia buildings are very attractive campus additions that offer our students functional improvements. Things just work better for them, and they’re receiving an upgraded university experience.”

Added Tony Aeck, son of Gaillard Hall architect Richard Aeck and chairman of Lord, Aeck & Sargent, “How poignant—these many decades later—that the firm my dad helped start has come back on campus to rehabilitate Gaillard and make similarly sweeping changes to serve what has now become a major university!”

The project team

The North Georgia College & State University project team included:

- North Georgia College & State University Real Estate Foundation – owner
- Ambling University Development Group (Valdosta, Ga.) – developer
- Lord, Aeck & Sargent (Atlanta office) – architect
- Eberly & Associates (Atlanta) – landscape architect
- Jones Lang LaSalle (Atlanta office) – program manager
- Andrews, Hammock & Powell, Inc. (Macon, Ga.) – MEP/FP engineer
- KSi/Structural Engineers (Atlanta) – structural engineer
- J&A Engineering (Marietta, Ga.) – low-voltage engineers
- Haines Gipson & Associates (Lawrenceville, Ga.) – civil engineer
- Camacho Associates (Atlanta) – foodservice consultant
- Choate Construction (Atlanta) – general contractor

North Georgia College & State University Project Facts

PHASE 1

North Georgia Suites (civilian housing)

\$15.3 million

147,347 square feet

604 beds – suite style

4 stories

Construction start: October 2009

Occupancy: August 2010

Patriot Hall (military housing)

\$9.15 million

87,124 square feet

352 beds – suite style

4 stories

layout customized to college’s platoon structure

Construction start: October 2009

Occupancy: August 2010

Walker Drive Parking Deck

\$11,300,000

6 stories

1,069 SPACES

345,336 square feet

90-foot bridge at top level

Construction start: October 2009

Occupancy: August 2010

Dining Hall

\$13.8 million

seating for 900 students

3,000-square-foot ballroom seating 240

36,860 square feet

Includes an adjacent 40-space surface parking lot

Construction start: May 2010

Occupancy: August 2011

PHASE 2

Chestatee Building

\$7.4 million

North Georgia bookstore – 15,700 square feet

North Georgia infirmary – 5,400 square feet

North Georgia auxiliary services – 2,600 square feet

coffee shop – 1,400 square feet

street retail – 6,000 square feet

North Georgia office space – 9,000 square feet

48,000 square feet total

3 stories

Location: one block from the historic square in downtown Dahlonega

Construction start: December 2010

Occupancy: August 2011

Liberty Hall (military housing)

\$7.3 million

65,343 square feet

264 beds – suite style

3 stories

layout customized to college's platoon structure

Construction start: December 2010

Occupancy: November 2011

Gaillard Hall renovation (military housing)

\$5.6 million

48,000 square feet

166 beds – suite style

3 stories

originally built in two phases (1951 & 1959)

Construction start: December 2011

Anticipated occupancy: August 2012

TOTALS (both phases)

Construction costs: \$69.85 million

Square footage: 778,010

Beds: 1,386

About Lord, Aeck & Sargent

Lord, Aeck & Sargent is an award-winning architectural, interiors and planning firm that has designed and restored institutional facilities on 120 different colleges and universities in more than 25 states. In addition to the academic market, the firm serves clients in scientific, 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, Georgia; Austin, Texas; and Chapel Hill, North Carolina. For more information, visit the firm at www.lordaecksargent.com.

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