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Heart of the Capital's Legal Community

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Heart of the Capital's Legal Community

On a hot, sunny day in mid-August of 2009, the first of many 18-wheelers left Buies Creek, North Carolina, and made its way to the Campbell University School of Law's new home in Raleigh. After more than thirty years in Buies Creek, thirty miles south of the capital city, the law school's new home is now two blocks from the state capitol, the state supreme court, court of appeals and federal courts.

The law school was established in 1976 in the oldest building on Campbell's campus, Kivett Hall.

In 2007, the unforeseen happened—the foundation of Kivett Hall was compromised and the law school lost two of its classrooms as well as a courtroom. A difficult decision had to be made: would the law school try to reinforce the foundation of the existing building, build a new law school in Buies Creek or relocate to Raleigh, the country's largest state capital without a law school?

Faculty members, university administration and the university board of trustees did a feasibility study, and on October 4, 2007, the board announced that the law school would relocate in Raleigh.

A flurry of activity followed the announcement. A building committee was formed composed of faculty members, students and the director of the library.

Needs, Wants and Challenges

At the planning stage, the library director asked students, faculty and library staff to submit their needs, wants and wish lists. The students' responses—of particular importance because the library was to be a place for them to feel comfortable sharing ideas, studying and learning—focused on more study rooms, study tables and comfortable seating. Library staff wanted adequate work and office space, and the faculty wanted the addition of an attorney resource room.

Beautiful Results

The end result is a library in Raleigh that truly has the “wow” factor. Occupying 25,000 square feet, the library is housed on the first two floors of the law school. Panoramic windows on all of the outside walls bring in an abundance of natural light while offering students beautiful views of the city.

The main entrance to the law library is located on the second floor of the law school. When visitors enter, they

immediately see the strikingly beautiful circulation/reference desk and reserve shelving shaped to reflect the octagonal tray ceiling directly above. The reserve shelving is in an enclosed bookcase with glass fronted doors; all of its millwork is custom and made of makore, an exotic African hardwood also used for the end panels of the shelving.

A grand central staircase connects the first and second floors of the library. Above the staircase is a pendent chandelier that is both artistic and functional. At the bottom of the staircase is a second circulation/reference desk servicing patrons who enter on the library's first level.

The library has a total of 275 seats for a student body of approximately 400 students. Soft, comfortable seating is intermingled with study tables and carrels and positioned in front of windows so that every study area has access to natural light. In addition, all study tables have lamps that provide light as well as power outlets.

A reading room is located on the first floor of the library, as well as three group study rooms. An additional five study rooms are located on the second level. Each of the study rooms is outfitted with an LCD monitor and whiteboard. In addition, the attorney resource room on the first level is open to all members of the legal community.

The library, as well as the law school, are completely wireless and have been outfitted with state-of-the-art technology. On the second floor of the library, 10 public access computers are available for use by both students and visitors. A printing/copying center is also located on this level.

The new library was designed for students, and they are drawn to its warm, welcoming atmosphere. Students love the casual seating, and study rooms are constantly in demand. In fact, the use by students has far exceeded expectations. Melissa Essary, dean of the law school, remarks that, “while our new law library is stunningly beautiful, more importantly, it is highly functional. When I give tours, the library is always populated with students hard at work, which always warms this dean's heart.” *By Olivia L. Weeks, Director of the Law Library, Assistant Professor of Law. Photo by Mark Lamkin.*