



Big dreams sometimes require even bigger buildings. No one knows this better than Bishop Dale Bronner, the founder and senior pastor of Atlanta, Ga.-based Word of Faith Family Worship Cathedral. Armed with lofty goals such as creating a safe haven for his community's at-risk youth and inspiring them to discover and fulfill their potential, he and the 19,000-member church funded the construction of the 113,000-square-foot Riverside EpiCenter, a multipurpose community center—the likes of which have seldom, if ever, been seen. The two-story facility, which is pursuing LEED Silver certification, houses an extraordinary range of programs, from a climbing wall and bowling alley to a recording studio and performing arts center.

The “wow” factor kicks in the moment visitors arrive at the parking lot and take in the structure itself, a stunning combination of

composite metal, glass, stone and concrete with curves and angles that converge to create an aesthetic that is at once both contemporary and stately. “We partnered with Pieper O’Brien Herr Architects (POH) based on their successful design of our chapel, fellowship and education facility,” says Executive Pastor Christopher Boyd, who served on the church’s project team. “They could see the idea in Bishop Bronner’s heart and actualize his vision in construction. In terms of the EpiCenter, POH did a great job of identifying creative and architecturally stimulating ways of bringing our vision to life. Not only is it a visually attractive facility, it also functions well.”

The multipurpose EpiCenter aims to fuel the hopes and dreams of the community in South Atlanta.

written by: Sue Wasserman

Top: Riverside Conference Center and Dale Carnegie Bronner Auditorium entrance.

Below: A detailed view of the cornice.



In addition to being responsible for the architectural design, POH also spearheaded the engaging interior design and venue branding, using its own in-house graphics and print capabilities. “It was an extraordinarily creative, collaborative and thorough effort by our POH architects, interior designers and graphic designers,” says Charles O’Brien III, AIA, POH president. “We are most proud that our design fulfills the bishop’s endearing request that we respond to ‘the mind, body and soul of the community.’”

FLEXIBLE FUTURE

While functionality was critical, POH was challenged to design a multipurpose facility whose destiny wasn’t entirely set in stone. “Bishop Bronner clearly wanted features such as basketball courts, fitness room, dance/aerobics area, internet café, conference space, performing arts center, gaming rooms, coffee shop and indoor track, but there were many questions that remained to be answered regarding facility management, hours of operation, security requirements, and who its users would be,” offers POH Project Manager Earl Smith. “Initially, the theater, for example, was funded to mirror a high-school-caliber facility. It evolved, however, into a center

that could accommodate professional performances and mid-sized audiences, something other metro-area facilities couldn’t accommodate. Consequently, our design had to evolve to accommodate their changing desires.

“Given the unknowns, the design team recognized from the outset that it had to design a facility that afforded the ultimate flexibility,” adds Smith. Four primary components had to be incorporated—youth area, food court and atrium, fitness club, and theater and conference center, each critical for fulfilling the bishop’s goal of touching mind, body and soul. Juggling multiple programs, end-users and hours of operations drove key design decisions such as creating two primary entrances—one for the fitness and community center and another to simultaneously serve the conference facility with its 600-seat theater.

“On one hand there are club members coming to work out or youth coming in after school,” Smith notes. “At the same time there might be a formal event in the conference center. While the community facility can be opened to allow conference center guests to enter the fitness area, we designed a number of spaces in a manner that allows them to be operated independently of each other, reducing energy demands.” Each of the individually zoned spaces can be maintained remotely.

UNIQUE ATTRACTIONS

The architects clearly pushed the design envelope with their dramatic use of intersecting planes and angles, both inside and out, keeping the structural engineers and contractors on their toes. It’s the plethora of unique finishes, however, that

makes visitors want to explore every nook and cranny, right down to the locker rooms. “While I know we’ve never used this many finishes on any project, I’m not sure of another project, certainly in the state of Georgia, that has either,” says Smith.

“The primary purpose of this building is to promote fun and excitement for individuals and families in a safe environment,” says O’Brien. “That goal refined our concept of placing similar and dissimilar activities and grouping them around a central pedestrian mall surrounded by various venues such as the coffee shop, recording studio, health club and rock climbing. While the facility as a whole is interconnected, we wanted to apply colors, finishes and materials to differentiate these venue options.” Differentiate they did.

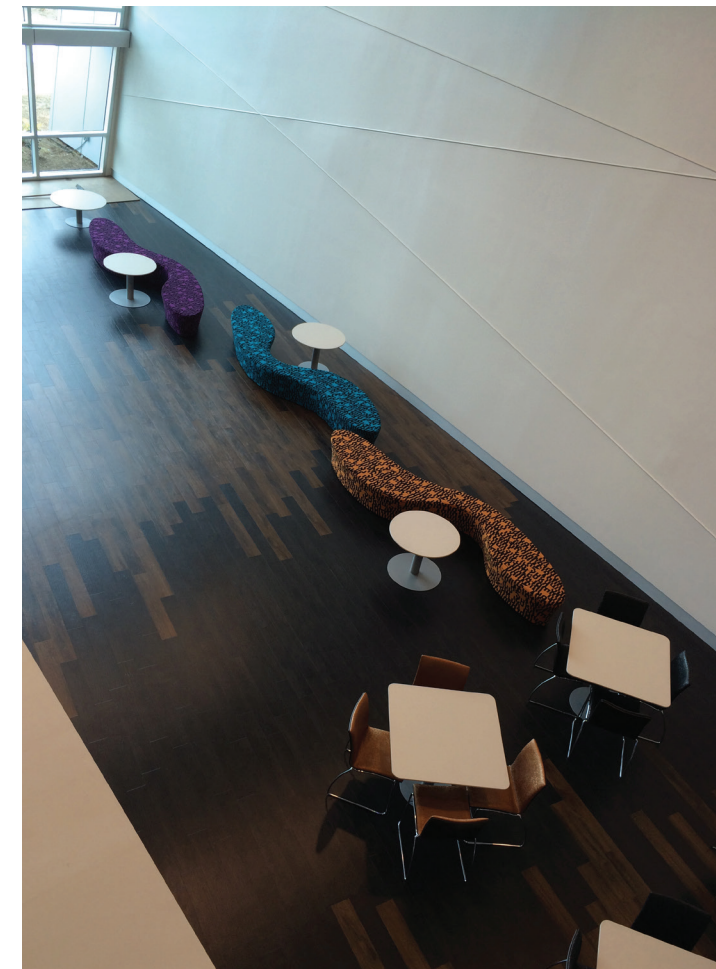
While the team’s goal was to select the most eye-catching materials for wall coverings and flooring, given the focus on reaching LEED Silver, the team also carefully verified where each product was produced and how much recycled content it afforded.

In their effort to use creative materials in an unusual manner, POH’s interior designers became immersed in countless conversations with manufacturers to determine how materials could best be applied. “We opted to use materials in highly creative ways,” O’Brien notes. The wood panels that line the theater wall, for example, needed to be larger than the manufacturer expected. “It was incumbent on us to find a solution that would keep the design intent intact and at the same time make the most of the material,” Smith says. “It was an extra hurdle, but one I think was well worth it.”

It’s easy to understand why neither O’Brien nor Smith can name a favorite area. “The POH team worked hard to make each individual space memorable,” O’Brien says. They are infinitely proud of the daylight that flows through the facility, eliminating at various times the need to turn lights on. They believe the youth game room area, with its creative lighting and curvilinear nooks, will prove equally comfortable to adults when special events arise. The bowling alley, with its state-of-the-art furnishings, turns an age-old tradition into a contemporary family adventure. Theatergoers will smile when the LED lights along the acoustic wall panels rhythmically stream alternating colors, adding an extra element of excitement to any event.



Top: The bowling alley was designed with state-of-the-art furnishings. Left: An overhead view into the Co-Motion Teen Spot.



“Good acoustical design was critical to the success of this project,” Smith says.

They admit the challenges revolved around the details. “Early on, we identified the LEED features which made most sense for the project,” Smith says. Water-efficient fixtures will enable the facility to save 450,000 gallons per year. Irrigation for drought-resistant landscaping will be derived from the facility’s rainwater collection and storage system. “Beyond the environmental and health benefits, Bishop Bronner can expect to realize annual savings of approximately

NEED-BASED DESIGN

Recognizing the potential for acoustic interference in the various spaces, POH hired acoustic consultants to address issues such as the potential impact a basketball buzzer in the gym might have on a performance taking place in the theater.

\$40,000,” says Smith.

Looking back, Smith believes the team probably devoted the greatest amount of time and effort to how they would incorporate daylight into the project. “While we wanted to create a facility where artificial light could be used sparingly, we

knew that too much light could create glare on equipment or light in areas where dark was preferable.”

With so much daylight moving through the building, for example, POH opted to adjust the angle of the performance center doors to keep light from spilling in when latecomers arrived. They looked carefully at the design of venues such as the conference center, noting that participants attending a lunch there might welcome ample light while attendees at a seminar might prefer dark to maximize the use of audio visual equipment. Design was significantly impacted by an understanding of which spaces would benefit from either direct or indirect light.

The size of the building and ever-changing numbers that might occupy it at any given time influenced a variety of decisions. First, the team had to devise a way for the building to expand and contract, ultimately settling on expansion joints placed in various sections of the facility. Those ever-changing numbers also dictated an ever-fluctuating demand for heating or air. “A capacity theater crowd has clearly different requirements than a small seminar,” says Smith.

To accommodate those ever-changing needs in the most sustainable manner, POH designed a state-of-the-art air flow system that controls the amount of fresh air brought into the building based on occupancy. “While the building systems are all automated, they can also be overridden at the facility or remotely to handle high-



Top: Theatergoers enjoy LED lights along the acoustic wall panels that rhythmically stream alternating colors in the Auditorium.
Below: An eyebrow canopy at the food tenant entrances.



attendance activities that might take place later in the day. We also installed CO2 sensors to automate temperature control in individual spaces based on occupancy,” says Smith. “We estimate that occupants will benefit from 30 percent more fresh air than would be realized in a comparably sized, non-LEED-certified facility.”

Although the project is complete, POH is excited that its work continues. “Given Bishop Bronner’s dream of inspiring youth, we’re planning to come back, not only to teach these children about the nature of this sustainable building which generates a LEED point, but we’ll be talking to students about possible career opportunities in math and science, architecture and graphic design,” Smith says. From Bishop Bronner’s perspective, the building is already fulfilling its purpose.

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