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SHAWENJIGEWINING HALL – ONTARIO TECH UNIVERSITY

by ROBIN BRUNET



T rue synergy in working relationships always leads to great ideas and helps overcome obstacles – and this certainly was the case with the development of Ontario Tech University’s Shawenjigewining Hall.

The four-storey (with one storey below grade and fifth level shell space) 110,000-square-foot building, located at the University’s north Oshawa campus, sits adjacent to the Campus Library and Energy Research Centre, and completes the university’s Polonsky Commons quad.

The building was designed by Architecture Counsel Inc. and Montgomery Sisam Architects Inc. (working in a joint venture) to house the Faculty of Health Sciences, Office of Student Life, Continuous Learning, and the Ontario Tech Student Union – as well as flexible research labs, classrooms, and study and lounge areas. Shawenjigewining Hall also contains Mukwa’s Den, a space that offers a home away from home for Indigenous students.

Brad MacIsaac, VP, administration at Ontario Tech University, says of the design build project, “I credit the close relationship between us and the architects as well as Eastern Construction Company for delivering a building that exceeded our expectations right on budget. And due to the trust, while we originally envisioned a building that looked similar to the other facilities around Polonsky

Commons, we agreed with the architects that due to its corner site location it should really stand out.”

Another benefit stemmed from Oliver Beck, principal at Architecture Counsel, earlier presiding over the development of Ontario Tech’s master plan. “Since 2012 I had been looking at the Shawenjigewining Hall site and conceptualizing what it could be,” Beck says.

The architects began the project by seeking input from a variety of user groups in 2018, the outcome of which was a unifying development philosophy. “The president had a vision of ‘Sticky Campus,’ and the user groups worked towards our goal to create a building that would make students, faculty, and staff want to ‘stick around’ because they are in welcoming and cozy surroundings,” MacIsaac explains.

Components pertaining to this philosophy included classrooms being generic shells (able to be easily modified); walls designed to expand spaces; and areas for students to collaborate and network. Additionally, with a focus on sustainability, the new building would draw from an existing geothermal grid; be filled with natural light and have operable windows for cross-ventilation; and in general function as a ‘living lab’ with exposed systems as part of the learning experience.

Enhancing the interior are many architectural elements, including a feature staircase to the west (where

the social spaces were located to optimize opportunities for natural light) that provided clear views of the upper and lower levels and effectively replaced a traditional atrium.

As for making Shawenjigewining Hall distinctive outside, black granite was chosen for the base, augmented by Algonquin limestone at ground level, and precast concrete sandblasted panels. A wood screen wraps the east side of the ground level leading to the main entrance, and this is protected by an overhang clad in metal that forms a band around the perimeter of the entire building. “The exterior was also augmented by a series of profiled precast panels that interact with the sun’s passage and animate the surface,” says Enda McDonagh, senior associate at Montgomery Sisam.

Construction began in June of 2019, and Dean Walker, project director at Eastern Construction Company, says while the pandemic lockdowns shut the site for five weeks, “when we reopened COVID benefitted us as the campus was empty and we were able to use a parking lot for laydown and storage. And although supply shortages affected us, we prioritized building elements so that for example door and hardware delivery could be pushed until towards the end of construction.”

Walker adds that the design build process “allowed us to nip potential problems in the bud,” and McDonagh

LOCATION

2000 Founders Drive, Oshawa, Ontario

OWNER/DEVELOPER

Ontario Tech University

ARCHITECTS

Montgomery Sisam Architects Inc. / Architecture Counsel

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

Eastern Construction Company

STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT

RJC Engineers

MECHANICAL/ELECTRICAL/ ENERGY MODELLING/ TELECOMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANTS

Crossey Engineering Ltd.

TOTAL SIZE

110,000 square feet

TOTAL COST

\$38 million

points out that costs were controlled “because a form of design assist was performed whereby we were able to work directly with certain trades during the development of the design to achieve the best outcomes for the design and budget. We did this for mechanical and electrical systems as well as for glazing and precast panels.”

As Shawenjigewining Hall nears completion, MacIsaac again cites close work relationships as the key to the project’s success. “The great collaborative spirit enabled us to come up with great design ideas and solve problems,” he says. “The result is a beautiful building, and I’m very excited to see it full of students.” **A**