MACTON® Turntable Divisible Auditoriums

"FLEXIBLE SPACE TAKES CENTER STAGE"

Printed in the May 1997 edition of ***School Planning and Management***

DESIGN FLEXIBILITY ALLOWS A NEW AUDITORIUM TO REMAIN FUNCTIONAL FAR INTO THE NEXT CENTURY, REGARDLESS OF THE POSSIBILITY OF ENROLLMENT REDUCTIONS.

by Lisa M. Jackson

With a burgeoning student population, administrators for Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Ill., were faced with a decision about the best way to create additional space to support the school's exponential growth. The high school, which supports six elementary districts, has been adding about 200 students per year and expects to reach a population of 4,000 by the year 2000.

"We knew our growth was continuing and that we needed to organize our student enrollment to a more manageable scale," says Jim Hintz, assistant superintendent for business.

After exploring a variety of options, a decision was made to expand the existing facility. With an investment of this magnitude, flexibility of space was critical. District administrators, in concert with a community task force and the architectural firm of O'Donnell, Wicklund, Pigozzi and Peterson (OWP&P), Deerfield, Ill., worked to incorporate practical elements that would serve the school far into the next century, regardless of the possibility of enrollment reductions.

The result was an additional building, designed for 1,200 students, which included classrooms, a unique auditorium and an Olympic-sized swimming pool. Completed in 1996, the addition was designed to accommodate the constraints of the existing building and break down the scale of a 685,000-square-foot facility. This was achieved by attaching the new addition to the original building with a glass-enclosed corridor. The new structure includes 60 core academic classrooms and coordinates the student population into three "houses."

ONE OF A KIND

The most dramatic illustration of flexible space is the 1,200-seat, turntable-divisible auditorium. This provides the ability to use three teaching stations simultaneously in a large space that would ordinarily be underused.

"We created a wish list with input from all the departments and decided there was a real need for a theater and an auditorium to support our choir, dance and orchestra programs," says Hintz. "We had a little theater that seated 150 and an auditorium for 580, which was pretty meager for a school of this size." Although the old auditorium had been remodeled several years earlier, it was still too limited for the needs of the school.

By applying a flexible design concept, architects were able to accommodate the necessary elements of the individual spaces and still maintain functional flexibility. "It's a unique concept," says Andy Mendelson, OWP&P's project principal. "This auditorium is the only one like it in the state, as far as I know. We were fortunate to work with

The complete 1,200 seat auditorium is perfect for large groups. Two smaller spaces can be created by closing the sides of the main auditorium using a rotating table. The floor, seating, stage and walls are all fixed on the rotating table. A slot in the ceiling allows the walls to turn 180 degrees to create the smaller areas.

With both the small theater and recital hall closed off, a 750-seat auditorium is created.

Photos courtesy HNK Architectural Photography, Inc.

a school district that had the vision to make the necessary investment and recognize the payback."

According to Hintz, it would have been a challenge to get funding for a separate theater and auditorium because of the lack of functionality in such big investments. "We knew it would have been difficult to finance both," he explains, "despite the fact the community expressed a strong interest in and need for the projects."

THREE THEATERS IN ONE

While the large auditorium supports 1,200 seats, two rotating platforms, supplied by [Oxford], Conn.-based Macton, can divide the large space into a 240-seat small theater and a 240-seat recital hall, leaving a 720-seat auditorium in the center.

"The concept is similar to that of a high-rise garage in an urban area," says Mendelson. The floor, seating, stage and walls are all fixed on the rotating table. A slot in the ceiling allows the walls to turn 180 degrees and create an area with complete isolation and integrity. The slope of the seating is designed to face the smaller or larger stage.

Both the smaller theater and the recital hall are acoustically isolated and fitted with an individual stage and equipment. The theater includes a deeper stage and theatrical lighting, while the recital hall has a more shallow stage area with tuned acoustics to enhance musical performances.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE COMMUNITY

"Everyone recognized that this undertaking would be costly, but we were convinced it would pay for itself quickly," recalls Hintz. "As a result, the project got a lot of support." The design enables the auditorium to help pay for itself through community rentals such as business conferences, park district functions, private dance company recitals and performing arts series performances.

In the past year, the auditorium has also become a performing arts center for the entire community, as well as the high school. "We knew the community had a strong interest in and need for a better facility," says Hintz. "Everyone has been very impressed with the phenomenal functionality of the design."

Lisa M. Jackson. is a freelance writer based in Bloomingdale, Ill.

When one side of the main auditorium is closed, a 240-seat small theater is created. The smaller size provides the opportunity for more intimate performances. Photo courtesy HNK Architectural Photography, Inc.