

# New student centre design set, construction to begin in spring

by Sarah Murphy

Out with the old begin with the new.

WHW Architects has been chosen as the firm of architects to lead the construction of the new UPEI student centre. After competing with 5 on- and off-island firms, the student union's student centre committee agreed that WHW Architects presented a concept and a fee best suited to the union and university's needs.

"[We] felt that the team they put together would produce a student-friendly building," said Heather Love, Student Centre Project Coordinator. "We would have been pleased with any of the [firms], but we are very confident that this one will do a great job."

BJ McCarville, Student Union President, agreed.

"[The architects] were really student focussed," she said. "They have been the whole way through."

The student centre's interior will feature a relaxing and inviting design, with extensive use of natural light. The multipurpose space will include a two-storey concourse.

"We are excited to finally see all of the pieces falling into place," said McCarville. "UPEI students are anxiously awaiting a new place to call our own with rooms for student government, a venue for live entertainment, and space to kick back between classes."

The exterior design presented to the university community last year will not be that of the new building. This depiction had been done for fundraising purposes only. No money had been spent on the creation of the building until recently.

Love mentioned that the business plan drafted by Coles Associates Ltd., a firm of architects, engineers, and management consultants, which includes all information gathered by the student union for the building since 1995/96, will be kept for the new building, despite the site change. Love added that although the new structure is no longer being built on the tennis court site, the

requirements of the building have not changed.

"The business plan is still a very useable document to put together project briefs," she said.

The site change was welcomed by the union. Love explained that the Alumni gym area had been the first choice for the building site. The framework of the Alumni Gym will be kept for the new building, along with the exterior brick walls. The student centre committee did not know that building on this site, using some of the fifty-year old gym's structure, would be a money saver.

"The university began putting its picture of what was going into the building," said Love. "The building went from a students only building, to a building with other university services. This created a big change in volume."

Location was also key.

"In a sense, [the Alumini gym site] puts a new front face on the university," VP Facilities Neil Henry said. "It's the main public entrance onto campus and University Avenue is a very busy artery."

Accessibility is a very important part of the building's concept, agreed Love and McCarville.

Construction of the student centre, a joint \$5-million project of the student union and the university, is scheduled to begin after classes finish in the spring of 2001 and is expected to be completed the following spring. The grand opening is planned for September 2002.

UPEI students have committed almost \$2 million and the province another \$1 million towards the project. Further funds have been committed through a successful faculty and staff campaign and from alumni donations. Roughly 60 per cent of the funding is in place. The university is also hoping to land a few more major capital gifts.

Operations Manager Aaron Carr, is not only busy planning for the opening of the new student cen-

tre, but also for the final goodbyes in the Barn. Several alumni feel that it is just as important to celebrate the years spent in the soon to be retired student union building, said Love.

Henry said there are no immediate plans for the Barn, present home of the Panther Lounge and student union services, near the UPEI Sports Centre. "All I would say is that I think it's going to be a very difficult building for the university to use," Henry said. "It is what it is, an old farm barn."

The new building will include the Panther Lounge, *The Cadre*, the yearbook, and services provided by the university, including the bookstore, a cafeteria and student counselling.

"Essentially, it's everything that's devoted to the student's life on campus," said Henry.

Unfortunately some campus organizations such as the Women's centre, which will be torn down due

to the size of the new building, have been left out of the project. Although McCarville said it was unfortunate, not everyone can have a space in the student centre.

"It comes down to the fact that we do not have enough money," she said.

*With files from the Guardian*

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