

Still Changing:



RBC PLANS FOR A NEW STUDENT CENTER

By Andrew Sharp

When you stand there now, it doesn't look like much. Part of it is the dim, chilly interior of a block-walled shop. Part of it is just gravel, punctuated with a chain link fence and some pine trees. As you stand there, you'll be beaten by a stiff wind that comes roaring off the fields, carrying thunderstorms in the spring and cutting like a knife in January. In reality, it's not there at all—it's just a drawing on an architect's page.

THE VISION

Plans are moving forward at Rosedale Bible College to take a new student center from that architect's page and put it where the current maintenance facilities are located.

Here's what the vision looks like. As you open the doors to the main entrance, you'll enter what RBC president Dan Ziegler calls the "living room of campus"—a spacious student lounge with a high ceiling and a double-sided fireplace toward the middle of the room, surrounded by comfortable seating in small gathering areas. It will be warmly lit with lamps, complemented with lots of natural light. Students will be able to study or relax in a small coffee shop just off the lounge, with a game room nearby.

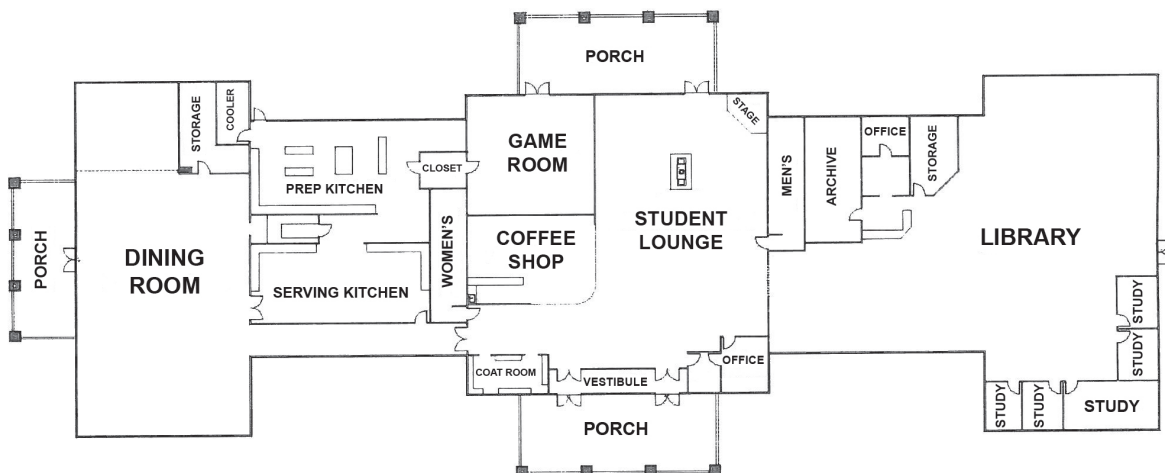
On one side of this activity hub will be a large open dining room, more than two times bigger than the current cafeteria. With windows on three sides, natural light will also be an emphasis in this room. Round tables will replace the current long tables, creating an atmosphere of fellowship.

Just on the other side of the student lounge will be a modern library, or "information commons." The vision is for a space that is less formal and restricted than the current library, with updated technology.

BEHIND THE VISION

This plan for a new space on campus didn't just leap randomly into the picture. It's part of a continuing trend of change at RBC that began years ago. The institution has been transformed since the 1950s, when it was a simple six-week Bible school. Over the decades, the terms got longer and volunteers gave way to paid teachers and administrators. With expanded academics came more land and buildings. Over the years, thousands of students studied at Rosedale Bible Institute.

Change continued when the Institute became Rosedale Bible College in 2001, granted full accreditation status as





part of the Association of Biblical Higher Education. Students were now able to use their education at RBC as a springboard to completing four-year degrees at other colleges and universities.

WHAT HAS LAGGED BEHIND?

While the catalog filled out with new courses like Spanish, Algebra, Humanities, Accounting, as well as overseas cultural experiences, students are living and studying in the same buildings they did 35 years ago. With one major, unavoidable difference: those buildings are now 35 years older. And while these structures continue to fill their roles adequately, administrators and students point to important areas that could use improvement.

The cafeteria and gym building, Ziegler noted, was built in the 1930s, and with its ceramic block walls, low ceilings, and dim lighting, it's an aesthetic weak spot on campus (ugly, to use the politically incorrect term). The design is awkward and not handicap accessible. The bathrooms are legendarily icy on cold winter days. "It really has outlived its usefulness," Ziegler said.

Besides a less than thrilling appearance and an aging structure, the building also hosts a cafeteria that provides challenges for the kitchen staff and student body. Director of Food Services Bill Burns explained that the layout is awkward—the coolers and freezer are located across a main hallway from the kitchen, traffic doesn't flow naturally, and the kitchen area is open to the dining room. Burns also noted that the dining area is not big enough for various events, as anyone who has helped with the summer program Choral Camp can attest, and even at a normal meal students have to maneuver around lines to grab a cup of coffee or a glass of milk.

The layout of student services is also less than ideal. Enrollment Services Coordinator Elizabeth Yoder pointed out that the coffee shop, ideally a center for student activity, is tucked in the classroom building on one end of campus, while the library is all the way on the other side in the chapel building. The small student lounge—also ideally a student hub—is on the other side of a wall from a classroom, so students either have to keep things hushed during class or risk bothering those

in the classroom. "And it just feels like campus is all spread out and not necessarily consistent," Yoder said.

The campus can feel spread out, yet there is little "hangout space," according to Jason Rueger, a second-year student from Lawrenceburg, Indiana. "There's pretty much just the student lounge and the library, and the student lounge is a place where maybe you can fit 15-20 students at most comfortably, and the library is a place for studying," he said. "So if you have a really big group, you almost have to go off campus or be in the cafeteria. Neither of those are very good options."

Of course, students have lived with the current layout for years, and done well. But as RBC has changed, it has become more important that students feel comfortable on campus, Ziegler said. "For the last three years, the majority of our students have been here for the entire year; that's new for Rosedale," he said. "And so as a college, one of the things that we need to provide is facilities that not only serve for the short-term experience, but actually are comfortable enough to be 'home' for these students for an entire year."

And while academics have advanced, and the library now holds more books and periodicals than ever, the library facility has fallen behind. The whole concept of libraries in academic environments has changed, according to Director of Library Services Reuben Sairs, moving to what he calls an "information commons" and away from simple collections of books. An information commons, in brief, has fewer books out on the shelves, more space for group study or for whole classes to use technology, and more computers and other electronic media. The atmosphere is less formal and open to conversation and food, with private rooms for those who like to study quietly.

Why is this approach needed? "One of the biggest changes I think is that the whole nature of research changed in the electronic era," Sairs said. People spend more time in the library using both electronic and print resources for their research, but book usage is down. "About 15% of a book collection, I understand, actually circulates," Sairs said. "So you have 85% of your books taking up a lot of room and they're not really being put to much use." Putting some of those books into storage and creating more space is ideal because more classes now require group projects, and people need to move around more, instead of simply sitting at a table taking notes. They are creating PowerPoint presentations, finding books, accessing the internet, scanning, copying and more.

The current library space is a mix of the old and new, with more traditional book-centric space, but with a newer tolerance of noise and social interaction. From 8-4, quiet is the rule, but after that it gets louder. "If you're trying to work on a paper, or you're trying to research something, it can be nearly impossible to try and do that in the library, evenings, just because of the volume and the amount of conversation and stuff going on," Rueger said. Sairs agreed. "Here we really are pitting the student who wants to make noise against the student who wants silence," he said. "In the new one...there will be space for everybody, from the quiet to the noisy and everybody in between...whereas now we have a place to put everybody but not keep them happy."

He observed that an information commons model is hardly cutting edge anymore, and it will be good to bring RBC up to date. "I am looking forward to having a lot of different types of space in the library so that we can accommodate more needs," he said.

ONE BUILDING, MANY SOLUTIONS

The planned student center is a way to upgrade all these areas of RBC life at the same time. Not only will the dining room be bigger, it will be better-designed and the kitchen will be modernized. Most of the student services and hangout areas will be brought into the same place with the research and study center—the library—bringing the campus together. And upgrading the library moves it out of the chapel building, making room available for additional educational space and much-needed faculty offices.

In short, the building will help the campus facilities stay on track with the upgraded academics. “When we provide facilities for our students, whether it’s a library or classroom facilities or learning facilities, we need to rise to the level of expectation for what you find at a college,” Ziegler said.

Yoder agreed. “When students come to Rosedale I’m giving them campus tours. And right after they leave Rosedale they’re going to other colleges and touring their college campuses, and they’re comparing us.” Ken Miller, faculty member and director of public relations, echoed that sentiment and added, “When you enter a place, you look for clues to give you indications of what kind of people are there, what do they care about, do they pay attention to details and that kind of thing...I think this building will make a statement that we are investing in the infrastructure and in doing that we are investing in the educational process.”



“Having a new building is a visible demonstration that the institution and its supporters believe it has a future,” Academic Dean Phil Weber said.

THE PLAN

All this improvement comes with a hefty price tag. The college is in the middle of a five-year plan to raise \$3.5 million for the construction of the new student center, including gifts in kind. After completing that phase of the campaign, a second phase will begin, raising funds for a gymnasium that will connect to the student center.

Before breaking ground for the student center, the board wants to have about 80% of the \$3.5 million committed, Ziegler said. This includes a \$1 million endowment to help operate and maintain the building after it is constructed. The college is wrapping up the first stage of the campaign, he said, which involved making presentations to lead donors and friends of the college to kick-start the fundraising.

One of many who have given to the campaign is Orville Miller, an associate pastor at Plainview Mennonite Church in Hutchinson, Kansas. “I’ve been a strong promoter of doing a year or two there [at RBC] before you go on to the other colleges and universities,” he said. “I think it’s really been beneficial for our children, particularly just at a time when they were searching.”

The student center, he believes, will add a lot to campus. “I see it as fitting in well with where we’re going as a school, and fitting in with the general idea of nurturing young people,” he said.

At this point, about \$1 million has been pledged, which is already the largest amount raised in RBC’s history. Ziegler is glad for that, but said ideally he’d like to be further along at this point. “The economy has definitely played into people’s ability to give as much as they might have otherwise,” he said. However, Ziegler still hopes to be able to break ground in the spring of 2012, if fundraising goes well. The whole project would take a little over a year, so on that schedule the building would open in the fall of 2013.

Before breaking ground, however, the ground needs to be cleared. The campus master plan puts the student center in the middle of the future campus. Inconveniently, the maintenance shop, wastewater system and propane tank occupy the same piece of land. Since no one is excited about incorporating them into the student center, this infrastructure will need to be relocated away from the center of campus, further out into the adjacent field the college owns. The idea is to get this initial step underway once about \$500,000 in pledges have come in.

TIMING

Some might question the wisdom of asking people to dig into their pockets for a record-setting campaign in the middle of the worst recession the country has faced in many years. Ziegler admitted the difficulty, but pointed out that the building had been a recognized need since the 90s, but for one reason and another, the project has never gotten underway. “You just can’t sit on the same facility indefinitely,” he said. After a feasibility study in 2008 showed strong support for the idea, the decision was made to move forward. Soon afterward, the economy worsened. The administration and board discussed whether to put the brakes on, but after prayer and consideration they felt led to continue investing in the college’s future, even if it meant taking longer with the campaign. “The recession doesn’t seem like a compelling enough reason to put the future of the college on hold...we have to invest in the outcome of this college, which is young men and women who are, Lord willing, the leaders of the church of the future,” Ziegler said.

That's not to say RBC couldn't get by with the current buildings for a few more years. "We don't mind being frugal," board member Tim Kennell said. "We don't mind trying to do the best with what God has given us... but there comes a time in a college when you need to take that next step."

Even in the face of a recession? "I think it's a legitimate question," Kennell said. "It does seem a little bit scary to move ahead with such a big campaign...but together we are all in agreement in stepping out, believing this is the way to go."

Some might also wonder about undertaking a campaign of this size when RBC's sister organization, Rosedale Mennonite Missions, is partway through a large campaign of its own for a training center in Columbus. "It's a concern for us, because we certainly don't feel like we're competing with RMM, we're supporting RMM...and now we're both trying to do some really significant capital campaigns," Kennell said.

Ziegler said he has occasionally been asked about the two simultaneous campaigns as he talks to donors. "I think the assumption is that both ministries are drawing funds from the same well," he said. This is true to some extent, he said, but noted that RBC's alumni base extends well beyond the Conservative Mennonite Conference. "Historically, 50% of RBC students have come from outside of the CMC, and our hope is that support for this campaign will extend well beyond the membership of the CMC alone."

Some potential donors, he said, would be more inclined toward one project or the other anyway. Some would lean more toward supporting missions, while others would tend to invest in Biblical education. And some are sacrificially giving to both projects. "There is much work to do for the Kingdom, and as God goes before us, I know that all of us at RBC and RMM are trusting that he will move hearts and resources to meet the needs facing both of these important CMC ministries," Ziegler said.



A WISTFUL FAREWELL

Of the old buildings, only the classroom building is slated for preservation. While the planned student center is a clear upgrade over the current structures, some will feel a little tug of nostalgia over these changes. "I know for some of the students that I've talked to about it here, for them the idea of coming back to Rosedale and having it different is tough," Rueger said.

"It's kind of sad to see the buildings change, even though the people are more what makes Rosedale what it is," women's Resident Assistant Jenni Wagler said. She does think the student center will be a positive for RBC, but added, "Just thinking of all the people who have memories in some of the older buildings...it's kind of sad to think about."

Indeed, simply replacing an older building with something newer won't bring the students in crowds. "I don't think we're really saying, 'Build it and they'll come,'" Kennell said. "We really are working on all kinds of other things so that students will come...it's just something that our students need."

IT'S PART OF THE PLAN

"One of our goals as a board is that we can upgrade our facilities, and that we can continue to grow academically, but also that we can keep the spiritual atmosphere of RBC," Kennell said. "If we can move all three of those things together that would be something I would really like to see us do."

How important is it to look to the future? "The church needs people of vision," faculty emeritus Willard Mayer said. "If it had not been for the vision of several of our CMC church leaders who promoted a six-week Bible school in the early 1950s, RBC would not exist today."

"I believe this vision [for the student center] will enhance the program of the college."

Andrew Sharp is staff writer for Rosedale Mennonite Missions.

Contact RBC president Dan Ziegler with questions, comments, or to find out how to be part of the campaign at dziegler@rosedale.edu

