

UWO Foundation announces plans for riverfront alumni center

by Mandy Potts - Thursday, September 01, 2011

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/13891/uwo-foundation-announces-plans-for-riverfront-alumni-center/>

The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh announced a plan today to expand the footprint of campus with a state-of-the art, riverfront conference center.

The 22,000-square foot UW Oshkosh Alumni Welcome and Conference Center will serve as the new front door to the University while also providing an enhanced conference and visitor's center for the campus and extended Oshkosh communities. The facility will house UW Oshkosh Alumni Relations, Foundation and Business Success Center offices in its location along Oshkosh's Fox River adjacent to the Wisconsin Street Bridge on the southern edge of campus.

The announcement of the welcome and conference center, which will provide a 30 percent increase in large-group campus meeting space, comes just as the representatives of a team of local investors, including the UW Oshkosh Foundation, announced they will [purchase and renovate the City Center Hotel in downtown Oshkosh.](#)

Plans for the welcome and conference center are years in the making for the UW Oshkosh Foundation. In the summer of 2008, torrential rains ripped through Oshkosh, campus' River Center conference space, located along Pearl Ave. The facility was flooded and destroyed. Since, master planning efforts have been underway to explore the idea of a new welcome center – with and without the option of a hotel – at the Wisconsin Street entrance to campus.

As the first step in this project, the UW Oshkosh Foundation acquired the Carl Steiger Park property this summer where the welcome and conference center will stand. The University will maintain the park and green space to improve public access to the area.

The welcome and conference center paired with an up-to-date hotel, which is less than two blocks away from the University, is an asset for both the UW Oshkosh and Oshkosh communities, said Arthur H. Rathjen, UW Oshkosh Foundation president.

“UW Oshkosh's robust year-round calendar of speakers, forums, conferences and events, hosted on campus makes large meeting space a necessity,” said Rathjen. “Events on campus provide a strong base of business for the downtown hotel. With more rooms to offer, the UW Oshkosh Foundation believes the hotel will be the campus guest and conference-hosting solution the University and downtown have long sought.”

<http://youtu.be/u0D5ufXjj6I>

To-date, renderings for the welcome and conference center have been created. However, cost and construction timelines are still being developed. The project will be funded through a developing UW Oshkosh Foundation fundraising campaign; the welcome and conference center project, like the hotel

renovation and its operation, will not utilize state funds or tuition dollars.

Even without a hotel property, UW Oshkosh has developed a strong reputation as an award-winning event and conference host. Gruenhagen Conference Center is the state's largest on-campus conference center, annually housing thousands of guests for University educational conferences and community events such as the popular Experimental Aircraft Association's AirVenture conventions and Badger Girls State.

The welcome and conference center will build on that success. It will feature a ballroom with capacity for 460 people, as well as meeting spaces for groups of 70-80 people, an oversized board room and breakout work rooms. The conference center, owned by the nonprofit UW Oshkosh Foundation and jointly operated by the University, will offer on-site catering and high-tech meeting spaces for alumni, faculty, staff and student events such as educational conferences and alumni reunions.

The collaboration possibilities between the downtown hotel and the welcome and conference center will strengthen the University tie to downtown and enhance Oshkosh as a destination for University guests, visitors and families of UW Oshkosh students, said Christine Gantner, alumni relations director at UW Oshkosh.

"With more than 80,000 alumni who frequently return to Oshkosh, this will give them another close-to-campus home away from home," Gantner said.

The University-hotel-convention center partnership is not new in the country. Universities like Washington State, Penn State, Kent State, Virginia Tech and many others offer a community connection through convention and lodging space on or in close proximity to their campuses.

"We have examined how several universities around the country have creatively and successfully connected hotels and welcome and convention centers to their campuses," UW Oshkosh Vice Chancellor for Administrative Services Tom Sonnleitner said.

"We believe all boats rise in our hotel and Alumni Welcome and Conference Center proposal," UW Oshkosh Chancellor Richard Wells said. "The demand for Oshkosh hotel beds is addressed. Just as important, the revitalized hotel's relationship to our Alumni Welcome and Conference Center only two blocks away will significantly enhance UW Oshkosh's first-rate reputation as a quality destination and host for educational conferences and events that advance our teaching, learning and public service mission."

The welcome and conference center, when complete, will join a number of new, dynamic University developments, The Student Success Center, located along Elmwood Blvd, opened its doors in the summer of 2010 and UW Oshkosh's first brand new academic building, Sage Hall, in 40 years will be open to students on the first day of classes this semester. The improvements were part of the University's strategic plan.

The new developments paired with updates like those done to Reeve Union in 2001 and to the Student Recreation & Wellness Center in 2007 help UW Oshkosh stay competitive, Wells said.

“We are proud of our campus’s growth and evolution over the last 10 years but also realize it is the students, faculty, staff and alumni maximizing these state-of-the-art new buildings who truly define UW Oshkosh as a place of excellence and opportunity,” Wells said.

Read more:

- [Horizon Village takes shape, construction on schedule](#)
- [Campus' newest academic building to be ready for students in September](#)