Historic Steps Forward
Major Addition & Renovation

Also Inside:
Rural Justice Initiative
Alleva Among Nation’s Best Teachers
Historic Steps Forward at UND Law

New Building Addition and Renovation

The 2013 North Dakota State Legislature and North Dakota Governor Jack Dalrymple made a historic commitment to the legal future of North Dakota by supporting an $11.4 million appropriation to the University of North Dakota for an addition to and renovation of North Dakota’s only School of Law.
A New Era Begins

“Thanks to the funding provided through the 2013 Legislature and approval by the executive branch, as well as the tremendous support of our alumni and friends, we have had the opportunity to engage all of our constituencies in an exciting process of thinking about how a new and renovated facility can meet the needs of legal education at UND for the next 50 years,” said Dean Kathryn Rand.

The May 2013 legislative approval set in motion the building project, and in August, the project gained steam as UND President Robert O. Kelley named ICON Architectural Group in partnership with SHW Group to lead the addition to and renovation of the UND School of Law.

ICON, with offices in Grand Forks and Fargo, N.D., is a premier architectural firm in the Upper Midwest. SHW Group, headquartered in Texas, is a national architectural firm specializing in education facilities. Together ICON and SHW Group bring extensive experience working in higher education, specifically with law school building projects across the nation.

Kelley also appointed a formal committee to oversee the building project, as well as 11 external advisors who are available to the committee for input as needed. Rand and Professor Paul LeBel, former Dean and Provost, are co-chairs of the seven-member Building Planning Committee.

“We started this project without drawings or plans,” said Rand. “Instead we started with a strong sense of our needs. We’ve known that we have a great need for improved educational space, as well as improved study and workspace throughout the law school so those needs are guiding the design process.”

A Detailed Process of Information Gathering

September and October were devoted to an intensive program of information gathering from all constituents including faculty, staff, students, alumni and other outside experts. Information was gathered through online surveys, workshops, focus groups, individual meetings, through the work of the individual design teams and on two benchmarking trips to law schools in Minnesota and Wisconsin. The gathering period also included a
comprehensive review of how the existing building currently meets and falls short of the program of legal education.

The architects came to campus on three separate occasions to gather information, present findings and create design ideas. An initial design concept was presented through a public Town Hall meeting on December 3, which served as the starting point for the design work they completed during their visit. Immediately following the Town Hall, the architects set up a temporary workspace on campus and began to do “real time” design, revising and refining the initial schemes/drawings presented. They used onion skin paper to sketch out ideas presented during a series of drop-in design planning workshop sessions with students, faculty, staff and others interested in the project.

As the design began to take shape, the University took another important next step with a decision to employ Construction Engineers of Grand Forks to serve as the “construction manager at risk” for the law school project. A “schematic design” package was submitted to the construction manager in January. The package included schematic drawings from the architects, the mechanical engineers, and the electrical engineers. Construction Engineers will use the schematic design to refine cost estimates, leading to the “design development” phase, in which construction documents will be completed and put out for subcontractor bids.

The latest schematic design combines an addition of approximately 15,000 square feet with renovation of the original 1920s law school building and the law library that was built in the 1970s.

The addition is planned for the triangular open space to the north of the existing law library, turning the “stepped” glass wall of the library into an interior wall. The addition introduces a new entry on the north, or University Avenue, side of the building, leading into a commons area that will promote student gathering and provide space for law school events. Clear pathways from the entry will lead to the legal clinic, to the law library, and to the student life and law school administration offices. The addition also includes a restroom core on each floor and a new elevator that accesses all levels.

Key Features of the Design

The key features of the addition are directly related to the student educational experience. A medium-sized “case study” classroom will fill the gap between the large classrooms and the teaching spaces that accommodate seminars and small classes. The other major instructional space in the addition is a modern teaching courtroom that complements the more ceremonial nature of the Baker Courtroom. New multi-purpose conference/seminar/meeting rooms are designed into each floor of the addition, as well as in many parts of the renovated space.

Additional faculty offices will enable the school to bring all current faculty into the law building and provide for modest growth in the future. Administrative workspace renovations will make offices more accessible to students and more efficient for staff. Security will be linked to a card access system that gives law students, faculty, and staff access to the building itself and to locations within the building at times when it is not open to the public.
Renovation priorities focus on the student experience. A completely renovated legal clinic will comfortably house up to 16 students with work space and interview/meeting rooms. A new flexible classroom will be constructed next to the large classroom on the basement level. The student organizations office will be located adjacent to a student life center that includes offices for student support functions from recruitment and admissions through career placement.

An extensive renovation of the law library is included in the schematic design. Library personnel are engaged in the national best practice of reducing the size of the collection, so the focus can be on service rather than shelving. The collection would then be concentrated on the basement and third levels of the library. The first floor would become the focal point for library services and technology support, with the remainder of that floor converted into student gathering and study space. The planning for the second floor of the library includes office and work space for the co-curricular activities of student journals and moot court, and for the Student Bar Association. In a much welcomed new feature of the law library, restrooms will be located within the library for the first time since it opened in 1973. For a more specific listing of the proposed features, please refer to the Dean’s column on page 2.

The addition and renovation will emphasize the historic character of the original law school building, without trying to replicate the details in the addition. The case study classroom in the addition, for example, will have an arched ceiling similar to the current third floor. The renovations will be consistent with the original 1920s design, with the law library given a more modern and welcoming feel for students and other library users.

“It’s been fascinating to watch the architects brainstorm innovative solutions to design challenges in real time,” said Rand. “The emerging design reflects the character of our law school — serving students and our curriculum, making the best and most efficient use of every space, and creating a professional educational environment.”

This historic project marks only the second major renovation/addition associated with the Law School in its more than 100 years of existence. The only prior major upgrade was the addition of the law library in 1973.