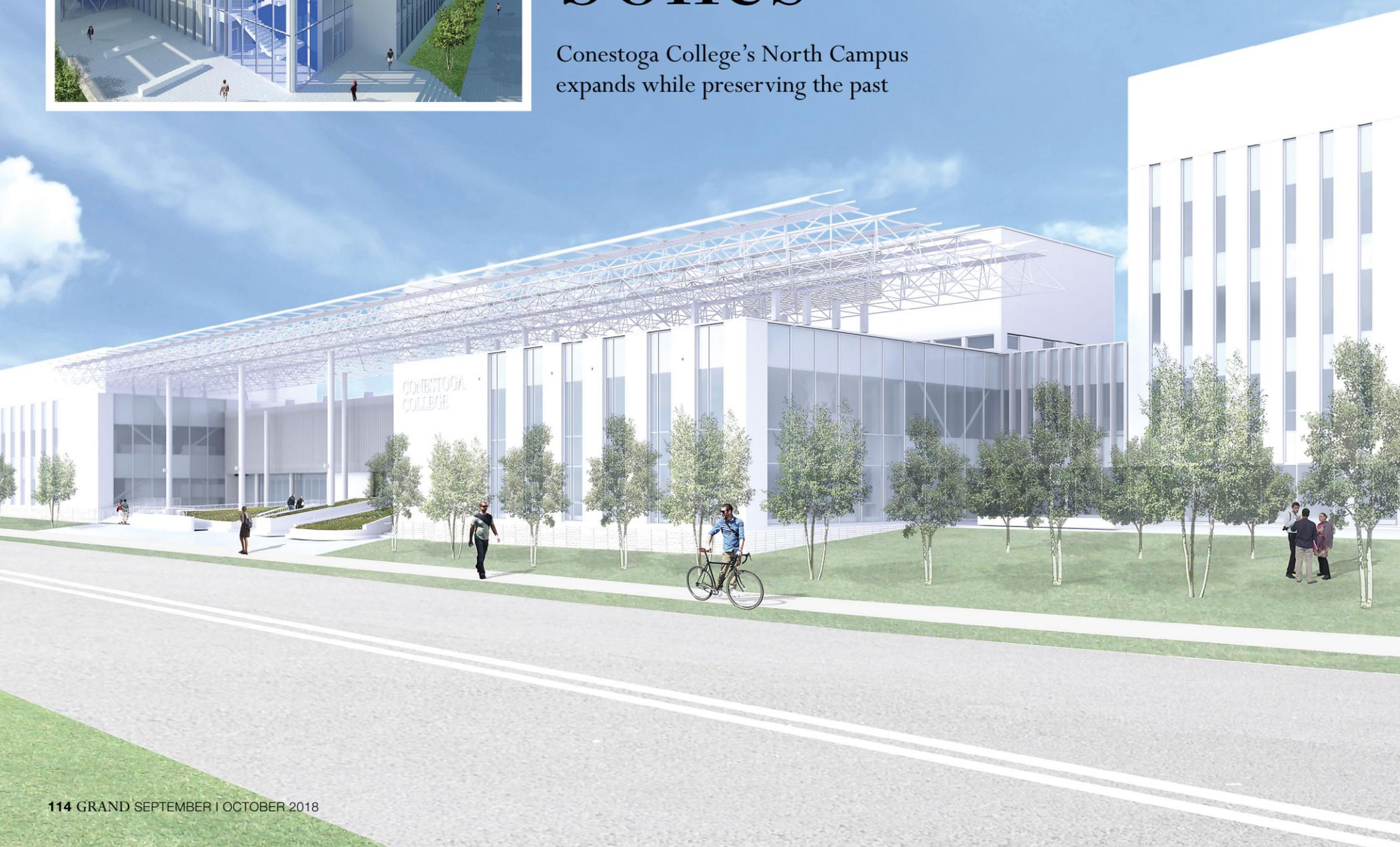




Building on strong bones

Conestoga College's North Campus expands while preserving the past



BY CAROL JANKOWSKI

Laurel Vocational School caused quite a stir when it opened on University Avenue in Waterloo back in 1968.

Fifty years later, the building, now Conestoga College's North Campus, is again generating a buzz, this time because of its modern "wow" factors and the seamless incorporation of some key elements of the late John Lingwood's original design.

Unlike many new buildings that seem to turn inward, closed to passers-by, Conestoga's bold, bright North Campus reveals its interior for the world to see.

The grey-tinted glass curtain shell constructed around the original building adds 150,000 square feet of usable space. The higher roof designed for solar panels is another 21st-century feature. Yet lead architect Daniel Teramura also preserved features from a half-century ago: the expansive glass entrance to an indoor courtyard and, overhead, nine of the 15 precast concrete window surrounds.

When they set about to enlarge the school, which it purchased from the Waterloo Region District School Board, college administrators were unaware the entrance and windows were significant architectural features of their day, Conestoga president and chief executive officer John Tibbits said in an interview.

Indeed, an early concept drawing of the proposed building, prepared for fundraising purposes, did not include the central entrance block that is now such an eye-catching feature.

However, by commissioning the Toronto architectural firm of Moriyama

Artist's drawings courtesy Moriyama & Teshima Architects

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Construction continued through the summer to complete the expansion of Conestoga College's North Campus, on University Avenue in Waterloo.

PHOTO BY DWIGHT STORRING

& Teshima to design a new building, Conestoga put its North Campus project in the hands of a team experienced in refurbishing and expanding older buildings, including some with designated heritage features.

Simply replacing the building was an option, says Teramura, a partner in the firm whose background includes seven years on the City of Toronto's Preservation Panel.

However, "our starting point is that you can sometimes strengthen and get something more interesting if you preserve some features of the original building,"

Teramura says. "When we got involved and looked at the original building, we thought it had real presence and strong architectural bones. It was also in very good condition."

One person who worried about the impact an expansion might have on the old school was Rick Haldenby of Kitchener, the former longtime director of University of Waterloo's School of Architecture.

"Lingwood used very deep window casings to emulate a traditional colonnade, even if, in a thoroughly modern fashion, he had the entire facade visually floating above a void," Haldenby explains. "It is

an interesting piece of design and one that I am very happy the architect was able to save and incorporate in the renovated building. I have always thought the central section . . . was the most significant aspect of the design, not just the windows, but the portico underneath the central section and the courtyard in behind."

In May, Haldenby included the Conestoga expansion in an article and a paper he presented to an Ontario Association of Architects conference in Toronto. His topic was six Post-War Modern buildings that were recently, or are currently being renovated in "appropriate and inspiring ways so that a wonderful cultural and material resource is not lost, defaced or wasted completely."

Teramura explains the look of the expanded building this way: "The central portion is effectively the front door; the new entry court is an important orientation and student space and keeps good flow. It is very open and transparent. People can see right through the building."

Inside the entrance, there is a large student cafeteria to the right. To the left is new kitchen space for Conestoga's expanding Culinary and Hospitality Institute classes.

There is also a larger, upscale version of Blooms restaurant, which is run by culinary students. Each semester, Blooms is open to the public for three- and four-course meals, both lunch and dinner, several days a week.

Teramura experienced first-hand Blooms' popularity when he tried to have lunch there during a site visit. Sorry, he was told. Without a reservation, he was out of luck.

The expanse and visibility of the glass entrance, interior courtyard and the activity beyond makes the entire section important public space, Teramura says, predicting Blooms "will become even more of a destination."

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In 1987, when Tibbits became president of Conestoga, the college had 2,000 students. Its Waterloo campus was 62,000 square feet of classrooms on a six-acre King Street North site.

Seeing Waterloo as a logical city in which to expand, Tibbits tried unsuccessfully to purchase land from the nearby Waterloo Inn.

He bided his time. Then, in the early 2000s, the public board listed the University Avenue building, by then called University Heights Secondary School. Under provincial regulations, other Ontario school boards get first dibs on available schools. Eventually the door opened to an offer from the college.

By buying the 125,000-square-foot school, the college not only doubled its teaching space in Waterloo, it gained the potential to expand on a high-visibility 12-acre property.

Initially, the teaching focus at North Campus was training for the construction

CONESTOGA'S IMPACT

- Established as a small community college in 1967, Conestoga College currently has 13,000 full-time students attending classes in Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge, Guelph, Stratford, Ingersoll and Brantford.
- Each year, 38,000 continuing education students take special-interest courses or work toward a diploma.
- In 2001, Conestoga launched its first degree program. Today there are more than a dozen in engineering, business, health, community services and the arts. One day it plans to offer masters programs.

trades, a small culinary and hospitality program, and introductory programs for recent immigrants.

But Conestoga was growing rapidly in enrolment and programs, and the former

high school didn't reflect its evolution to a degree-granting polytechnic with a growing number of foreign students. Expansion planning began.

Redevelopment of the property was ambitious in both scope and timing.

In December 2016, with the announcement of \$14 million in federal funding, \$1.8 million from the province and a remaining \$27.7 million from the college and community, Conestoga College unveiled its North Campus plans.

The following October, Cowan Foundation became Conestoga's single largest donor of private funds with a gift of \$4 million toward the expansion.

The timeline was tight. Seventeen months — that's all Cambridge contractor Collaborative Structures Ltd. (CSL) was given to transform the 1960s building into a sleek new multi-use campus.

Construction started the third week of March 2017, with work to be completed by September 2018. Students at North

Campus would continue to attend their regular classes while work went on around them.

In an interview, project manager Dan Dietrich, CSL's man on the spot, outlined some challenges.

Having students onsite was one. Parking was another. Space was scarce for heavy construction vehicles and handling of materials could be awkward.

"We built a wall to separate the student and staff areas from the construction," Dietrich says. "Their safety wasn't an issue, and because the area was exempt from noise bylaws, we were able to get most of the noisy work done between 6:30 and 9 a.m. Foremost was maintaining student safety."

A five-week strike by teachers in late fall of 2017 "didn't affect us a lot," Dietrich says, unlike last autumn's wet spell "which came at the wrong time when we were trying to put the roof on." An unusually long, harsh winter followed.

If that weren't enough, CSL took on extra unscheduled work, completing a previously unfinished floor as well as other space in the building that had been intended for future use. The additional work, scheduled once new enrolment projections pointed to the space being needed sooner than anticipated, raised the total cost of the expansion to \$58.2 million.

By February of this year, new kitchen equipment was arriving. By March, while some jobs were behind schedule, others were ahead. It balanced out, and Dietrich felt confident the schedule would be met.

Materials used in the redesign include the glossy glass curtain wall that loses heat at night and gains it back in sunlight. With argon-filled double-pane glass and protective glazing, it meets the current code for energy efficiency, Dietrich says. The solar panels are a partnership with Waterloo North Hydro.

All in all, Dietrich says, "it's a sharp-looking building."

Of course, in the academic world, the lasting impact of what happens in classrooms and labs is more important than its buildings.

Waterloo Region's reputation as a technology hotbed makes North Campus the ideal location to expand the college's computer science programs and bring all those students under one roof. This fall, it introduced four new degree programs.

Another area of surging growth is Conestoga's graduate certificate training programs, intended for university and college graduates looking to the college for updated, specialized training to sharpen and define their skills. Classes are held in the evening to accommodate work schedules, and as of this fall, 15 certificates in fields as diverse as human resources, environmental controls and cyber security are offered.

The college's culinary, hospitality and beverage management program was also due for an upgrade. At one time, when the

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The original building, then known as Laurel Vocational School, is shown on the evening of Dec. 9, 1968. Photo courtesy of University of Waterloo Library. Special Collections & Archives. Personal Studio fonds.



KITCHEN UPGRADES

New state-of-the-art culinary facilities at Conestoga College's Waterloo campus feature four teaching kitchens, with another two coming online congruent with enrolment and funding.

Particularly noteworthy, the design of the two main teaching kitchens features a retractable glass wall, allowing space for up to 48 individuals to participate in competitions, team-building and professional development. That space and a new student-run restaurant face University Avenue, bringing the college closer to the street, allowing the public to see in as they pass this prominent landmark. The new culinary facilities and associated event space are tailored to Waterloo Region's historical roots and proximity to farms. For instance, an emphasis on butchery, charcuterie and artisanal cheese will reflect Kitchener-Waterloo's rich German history. Other features include a dedicated lab for baking and pastry; space for mixology and wine tasting; and two new demonstration theatres with raked seating for 55 and 100 respectively, overlooking full-on kitchens. A new research kitchen, building on the college's existing strengths in food processing, supply-chain management, nutrition management and seniors' care, has a goal of supporting local industry. — Alex Bielak

region didn't offer today's range of sophisticated dining options, Conestoga had 80 culinary students.

Today, with high-end restaurants in every part of the region, a diverse population, enhanced research on the nutritional needs of different age groups and a foodie culture that considers cooking a cool, challenging pastime, enrolment in Conestoga's Culinary and Hospitality Management Institute is forecast to climb from the current 350 students to about 900 by 2023.

Course offerings include culinary planning, preparation and presentation in a variety of food service environments. Students learn cost-control and kitchen management techniques as well as food safety regulations and procedures.

A new research kitchen will offer opportunities for product development and testing. As for those leisure-time foodies, there are new part-time and short courses in cooking for pleasure.

Culinary grads will still find careers in hospitality, Tibbits says, but also in institutional sectors serving university students, long-term care patients and assisted living communities.

Another key feature at North Campus is a medley of services to help newcomers to Canada find success. Over the years,

Conestoga has trained almost 10,000 immigrants through its federally financed Language Instruction for New Canadians (LINC). Now, for the first time, in the new Access Hub, LINC will be offered alongside career counselling, job training and job-finding assistance, all under one roof. Some child care may be available.

Access Hub services will benefit both students and employers, Tibbits says. A variety of practical short courses will be offered with "a huge emphasis on helping the under-employed."

Tibbits builds for the future and calls the revitalized North Campus Phase 1 of Conestoga's Pathways to Prosperity initiative.

In April, the Ontario government announced it will spend \$90 million to launch a new 150-acre campus in Milton, near the Niagara Escarpment, where Conestoga College and Wilfrid Laurier University will be partners in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) teaching. Fifty acres will be located in the proposed Milton Education Village, the other 100 acres will be protected land for hands-on learning in environmental science.

Just like Conestoga, Tibbits, Ontario's longest-serving college president, is not done. 

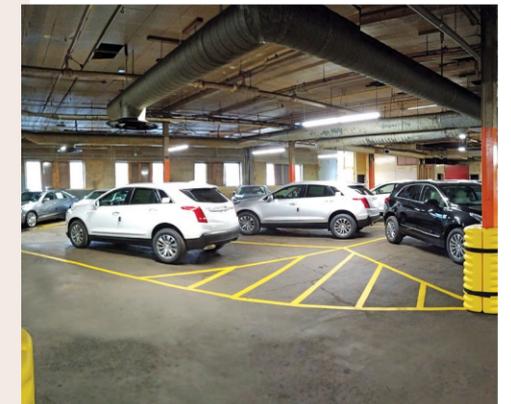
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