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### A Great Sign

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# A Great Sign

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Office of University Communications

November 4, 2011



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Most architects insist that buildings have character, personalities even, much like individuals and communities. That is certainly true of Gardner-Webb's Tucker Student Center, which GWU President Dr. Frank Bonner promised will be "the single-most impressive and most transformational building ever built on Gardner-Webb's campus." Complete with skylight ceilings and glass walls, open staircases and fresh-air balconies, the Tucker Student Center's personality was designed to mirror that of Gardner-Webb's community: open, relational, transparent and unique.

When it opens in the fall of 2012, the Center promises to completely transform the student experience by inscribing itself into the center of every aspect of campus life. Recently, in a special symbolic "Topping Off" ceremony, Gardner-Webb students, faculty and staff returned the favor, inscribing their names onto the building's final structural truss before it was "flown" into place above the Center's main entrance.

"The flying of the truss is a very special tradition in the world of construction, an important symbolic moment when that last structural piece is put into place," Bonner said before adding his signature to the beam. "The Center is built for our students—they are its purpose.

So it is quite fitting that they had this opportunity to permanently inscribe their names, and solidify their presence, within the walls of such an important structure on our campus.”

Lisa Tucker, Gardner-Webb alumna and daughter of Bob and Carolyn Tucker, whose monumental gift launched the Student Center project, also autographed the truss. “We certainly thank Lisa Tucker and her family for their friendship and generosity. Without them, this day may not have been possible,” Bonner said. Bonner also thanked the Frank Stewart family, Duke Energy, the Cannon Foundation, and the numerous individuals who have financially supported the Center, as well as Holland and Hamrick Architects and Rodgers Builders for their work in designing and constructing the facility.

After the truss was signed, Roger Holland and Greg Melton of Holland and Hamrick led Bonner, Tucker, and several members of the Gardner-Webb family through a walk-through of the unfinished facility. They explained that several of the building’s features, including the skylight ceilings that provide natural light throughout the facility, make this building “unlike any other student center in the United States.”

Intent on “getting it right,” the architects and the GWU administration visited numerous other centers with notepads in hand. “We wanted to avoid some of the pitfalls we noticed in other centers, while also incorporating the things we liked in other centers, and making them even better,” said Holland. “The primary goal Dr. Bonner and the administration gave us was to create a facility that was for the students—not the alumni’s space, not the donors’ space, but their space.”

To meet that goal, Holland and Hamrick made openness their theme, utilizing glass walls and open concourses, open staircases and glass elevators, making visual and audible communication possible across vast areas and even across different floors. A band could even perform a concert in Steward hall, Holland explained, and project their sound throughout all three of the building’s other levels because of the open design.

“We didn’t want to compartmentalize students into small study areas. We wanted them to feel connected, whether they are studying, eating, socializing, or just interacting as they move through the building. We’ve designed this Center so that students are never isolated from one another,” said Holland. “This entire building is one big space where students can study and socialize.”

The building also features open-air terraces and balconies on each level, offering breathtaking views of the Lake Hollifield Complex that have never before been possible. The porches will feature double-sided fireplaces, offering warmth on chilly fall and spring evenings when students may want to lounge outside and study or socialize. And those perks are just the tip of the iceberg.

“We’re usually very critical of what we design, and we certainly don’t want to pat ourselves on the back. But honestly, at this stage, I don’t see anything I’d want to do differently,” Holland said. “This has been a wonderful collaborative effort between everyone in our office and the administration and staff at Gardner-Webb. I’m so excited to see the finished result that I wish the building was finished tomorrow.”

Judging by the countless signatures, messages, prayers and memories scribbled on the symbolic final truss, Gardner-Webb students feel the same way.