

TAR HEEL TRIUMPH

Upon entering the lobby, the dynamic "Woven Scroll" sculpture by artist Norman Lee adds a vibrant touch to the venue's interior.



NC Courthouse Project Expands and Enhances Justice Hub

By CN Staff



The new courthouse is public-facing on all four elevations, each with differing context, vantage points, access adjacencies and function.

WITH a growing population that has more than doubled since its previous courthouse debuted almost 50 years ago, Cabarrus County, N.C., was more than ready for a vital new justice hub. And Silling Architects teamed up with Messer Construction on a CMAR undertaking that has delivered a venerable venue already boosting Concord's downtown civic campus.

Debuting on May 31, the Cabarrus County Courthouse project included 240,000 square feet in new construction, 72,000 square feet in existing facility renovations, four Superior Court jury-capable courtrooms, six District Court courtrooms, two future courtrooms, a 45,000-square-foot shell space for future growth, and 14,000 square feet of expansion space in the new facility.

To get the inside scoop on the sophisticated and multifaceted undertaking, CN checked in with Silling Architects' Jeremy Jones, AIA, Architect & Project Manager for the Cabarrus County project, for his thoughtful takeaway from the impressive achievement.

How does the new Cabarrus County Courthouse stand out the most from other projects of this type you've worked on?

Our team immediately recognized the County's ambitious approach of establishing at the onset the project's driving design principles. These invested contributors were vast in their roles, responsibilities, and passions; however, the devotion to a unified mission was incredibly harmonious. The project aspires to be contextually responsive and experiential to fully reflect the history, spirit, and character of this unique place and population. With concepts firmly entrenched and cohesive, we could better facilitate this overall vision through the court campus's evolutionary story - one



The main focus of the project was 240,000 square feet in new construction.

derived in honoring the scale, proportions, materiality, order, and rhythms of the historic backdrop while creating a respectful, era-pertinent compliment with the new courthouse facility.

What was the most intriguing challenge from a design perspective and how did you approach it?

We wanted to immerse immediately into the fabric of setting by instituting informative design parameters, enriched with subtle and poetic undertones pulled from the history of Cabarrus County. Crafting a concept through detailed research and analysis of the textile industry's

heritage in the local culture, the true "challenge" of overall interconnectivity for both the site and the complex internal circulation networks were comprehensively investigated. Cues were appraised through the textile weave, arts, and maker-culture in association with mood and movement. Certainly, no small feat in commencing with the assertive urbanistic crown of reimagining the vehicular-oriented Means Avenue as a veranda-like plaza and pedestrian thoroughfare.

The new courthouse is public-facing on all four elevations, each with differing context, vantage points, access adjacencies and function. The main public entry



Natural light and sweeping views are emphasized throughout much of the new courthouse.

atop the decorative and durable terrazzo flooring etched with the county boundary lines, they enter the generous and spacious queuing area. Once through screening, discernable way-finding directs visitors throughout the daylight circulation networks to their destination, with boundless viewsheds to the striking locale along the way.

How did the collaborative aspects of the project go, and did you have any key partners in particular?

Above and beyond the usual key players of consulting disciplines, we collaborated heavily with the incredibly sophisticated team of Infrastructure and Asset Management for Cabarrus County. The systems provided were fully vetted during the design process, and monthly tours of the facility provided a foundation of familiarity to the end-users and maintenance staff for a seamless start-up in operations.

lobby was identified as meaningfully integral with the plaza, facing Union Street, where familiar approach and connectivity to off-campus parking were deemed most site-subservient. With the diverse and expansive program, building massing involved a hierarchy of prominent court-sets, public pre-function spaces, and programmatically relevant forms cast to the corresponding elevations in an appropriation of scale. Envelope materials were selected as high-performing, sustainable and contextually complimentary; once again drawing on warp-and-weft influences through layered solar-shading and mullion pattern movement.

How did you strike the balance between a welcoming civic venue and a safe and secure justice facility?

Balance is always a defining characteristic we strive to attain in the intricate and labyrinthine organization of the complex judicial project typology. In addition to the responsible - and standard - zoning separation of the general public, court staff, jurors, and the incarcerated, this project introduces a counsel network into the paradigm. Due to the massive docket in this ever-growing County, as well as desirable efficiencies from the judiciary to better administer proceedings, the bar is granted limited access to building program beyond the typical front-of-house offerings.

As one can gather, the courthouse diagram works best sequentially from a security-centric core working outward with layered levels of credentialed access, concluding with a considerate, accessible, and open public arena. A highly secure below-grade sallyport and separated court staff parking are served by vertical circulation nodes transporting occupants to these interrelated zones of activity. Extensive queuing and screening are directly adjacent to the two-story entry lobby, with the security command center at the building core featuring a clear visual sightline to the arrival point, surveillance camera monitoring, mirrored privacy glazing, communicating stair to central holding below, a local armory, and return-fire gun ports in the ballistic-rated enclosure. Regarding stacking, the more frequented and active program, such as public counter interactions with the clerk's offices and associated high-traffic court-sets are located on the first level. The elevated levels of court activity directly correlate with the importance and hierarchy of the proceedings contained therein.

In stark contrast, our project also necessitates an accommodating, inclusive, equative, unbiased and gentle environment in alleviating the seams of apprehension. We chose to reinforce these notions with delicate, intimate detailing and finish selections, reflective of the interlacing threads as a principal concept. Beginning with the campus approach, visitors traverse through the natural balance of the Means promenade landscape and hardscape features, funneling and ascending to the building entry portal. Upon entering the lobby, the dynamic "Woven Scroll" sculpture by artist Norman Lee is suspended above as an analogous motif to the overarching architectural ambition. As visitors jaunt



The new venue includes four Superior Court jury-capable courtrooms and six District Court courtrooms.

The construction manager of Messer Construction was actively leaned on as both a resource and ally during the preconstruction phases in BIM coordination, clash detection and cost estimating. The overall project success was indicative of the multi-headed driving force between design team, consultants, owner, and contractor as a singular, unified body with one collective mission. This cohesiveness was maintained as local AHJ officials and third-party inspectors became acquainted during permitting through final completion of construction, and all the usual obstacles encountered in between.

What kind of feedback have you received since the facility opened?

We strive to be as transparent as professionally possible during all design exercises in culmination of the finished product, thus, feedback becomes more fluid during this life cycle of development. Although nothing can be conveyed completely on paper or imagery through presentation or discourse, as one's senses are completely encompassed by the physical built environment. Courtroom and envelope mock-ups performed materialize closer to that final ambiance, where scrutiny can be most accurately gauged. Now at final completion with the building fully operational, as we tweak/commission the working systems, we are receiving an abundance of positive sentiments from the community and beyond.

Photo Credit (all): Silling Architects