

"Of the hundreds of school buildings completed by C.T. Taylor, this is by far the most unique."

Meeting Needs at NEOMED

Campus expansion continues with new medical office building, STEM+M school addition

By Mark Watt | Photos by Todd Kaminski

When the 177,000-square-foot NEOMED Educational & Wellness (NEW) Center opened in 2014, it provided a warm, welcoming front door to the public medical university's campus in Rootstown with its immense tree-lined atrium, while creating a home for several new initiatives. Not only did it introduce new academic spaces, fitness facilities and conferencing areas for use by NEOMED students, faculty and the surrounding community, it also established a home for Bio-Med Science Academy, a STEM+M public school formed in 2012.

Six years later, a confluence of emerging programming needs have led to the opening of the MOB (Medical Office Building), a 92,000-square-foot addition to the NEW Center. Designed by Hasenstab Architects and built by C.T. Taylor Construction, the \$20 million, four-story facility houses purpose-built spaces for three separate tenants. The top two floors and a portion of the second are dedicated to Bio-Med Science Academy, more than doubling their space on campus with academic areas for grades 7-12. Also on the second floor is NEOMED's Wasson Center for Clinical Skills, a medical simulation testing facility, plus university-run clinical spaces.

Lastly, design is currently underway to build out first-floor shell space into an urgent care center through a partnership with Akron-based Summa Health System. Summa recently announced it's leasing 20,000 square feet to house physician clinical services and medical offices, radiology, lab services, cardiology, endocrinology, orthopedics, behavioral health services and more.

"When completed, this addition will be valuable for faculty and students, but also the community at large," says Mary Taylor, NEOMED vice president, operations & finance. "We are ideally situated right off of I-76 so it's very convenient for Rootstown community members, and the expansion of health services and urgent care is going to be very important to



them. We're excited about the expansion of our own spaces on the second floor, which includes telepharmacy and telehealth services. It's also great to have the Bio-Med Science Academy here with a very high-quality learning environment."

Funding for the project was a partnership between the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission (OFCC), which contributed \$12.4 million in construction costs and managed the Bio-Med Science Academy portion of the project, and NEOMED, which paid approximately \$2.5 million, Taylor says, adding that the remaining \$5 million came from NEOMED's cash reserves to be reimbursed later through new debt or bonds.

A decade of development

The newly opened addition bookends a decade of campus improve-

ments led by former president Jay Gershen, D.D.S., Ph.D., who retired from NEOMED late last year. In 2010, Gershen joined the university, then known as Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine (NEOUCOM), and immediately launched a master plan to upgrade campus facilities and increase student enrollment.

After announcing the university's rebranding as NEOMED (Northeast Ohio Medical University) in April 2011, Gershen oversaw a series of campus expansion projects, including construction of its first on-campus housing facilities (The Village at NEOMED), a research tower (Research and Graduate Education Building) and updates to existing facilities, including a new south wing of the school's main building completed this summer. The centerpiece of the



TAKING SHAPE Flexible learning spaces are located throughout, including a multipurpose lunch room/meeting area (top) and collaborative stairs (middle). Elsewhere, a third-floor mini-stage encourages performances and informal gatherings (bottom).



campus transformation, however, was the NEW Center in 2014.

The building was configured with a 52-foot-high atrium at its core with conference and event services, a lecture hall, fitness center, coffee shop, clinical pharmacy and primary care clinic situated along its perimeter. Its entire 30,000-square-foot third floor, accessed by a secure elevator, was designed to house Bio-Med Science Academy, then one of just a handful of public high schools in Ohio dedicated to a curriculum of science, technology, engineering and math, plus medicine (STEM+M) and the first in the country to be located on a university campus.

Even as the NEW Center immediately expanded campus offerings, it was also designed from the start to accommodate further growth with possible expansion envisioned on its northeast corner. In February 2018, NEOMED interviewed and hired Hasenstab Architects to make that expansion a reality.

Sitework + exterior design

C.T. Taylor Construction was hired in August 2018 and broke ground in April 2019, starting with demolition of portions of the existing parking lot and building pad. “The biggest challenge with the site was that there were a lot of underground utilities – and I mean a lot,” says David Hamm, project manager with C.T. Taylor Construction. “We went through extensively to find what we could but there were still some surprises because there had been many additions through the years. There was a duct bank in particular that was a challenge to work around and it required careful coordination in laying the foundations.”

Brendan A. Brzoska, structural project engineer with Thorson Baker + Associates, concurs. “The extensive number of underground utilities encountered during construction prompted creative solutions on the fly,” he says. “Footings were dropped, rotated and resized to avoid interrupting existing utilities.”





OPEN TO NEW IDEAS The school's expanded spaces provide a lively, stimulating and even fun learning environment. For instance, a collaborative staircase includes a slide that carries adventurous students from the fourth floor to a landing on the third floor below.

Like the adjoining NEW Center, the addition is structural steel with an exterior palette of ACM metal panels, brick and glass/aluminum curtainwall. The goal was to blend the appearance with the existing design, so identical materials were sourced and utilized.

Because of its orientation on the northeastern boundary of campus, the MOB is the first facility visitors see when approaching from the highway.

"We had to walk the balance of designing a building that fit in with the rest of the existing architecture," says Greg Chaplin, project architect with Hasenstab Architects. "At the same time, there was an intent to create a more pronounced, obvious entry space for Bio-Med Science Academy on the exterior. Even though they are effectively a tenant within the NEOMED world, they wanted to have their own identity. So they have their own distinct entry space visible on the north side of the building."

Two tenants, two visions

Inside, from a programming perspective, the vision for the addition was multi-pronged, Chaplin explains.

"First of all, Bio-Med Science Academy was looking to bring 7th and 8th grade classes up to join the high school at this location on the upper floors," he says. "They wanted to extend their programming with spaces

that expanded on their teaching style, which is very much centered on collaborative learning experiences in a very flexible, creative environment."

Secondly, NEOMED was looking to relocate its Wasson Center for Clinical Skills to the building's second floor. The Wasson Center is a simulation facility that allows medical students, healthcare professionals, first responders and others to train and practice individual and inter-professional clinical skills. From a design standpoint, that meant creating a series of virtually identical exam rooms with integrated audio communication and video recording systems for testing purposes.

"You have two completely different owners under one roof here, which makes it very interesting," Chaplin says. "You have an extreme open learning environment, really taken to the max, within the Bio-Med Science Academy, and then there's NEOMED's spaces, which had a lot more of a strict curriculum and are designed to serve a specific purpose to meet established guidelines."

2nd floor: Function-focused + clinical

Primary entry into the addition's second floor is provided from the NEW Center atrium, accessible from a newly reconfigured stair just inside its main entrance.

"Reworking the stairway required a lot of coordination with the Rootstown

Fire Department and NEOMED because there was limited space to work with," says Hamm, of C.T. Taylor. "NEOMED wanted the Wasson Center to be an evident, obvious piece within that main atrium so we needed to develop that entry, which included creating a new landing and building an extension of the floor to get into the addition."

Once inside the Wasson Center, visitors are greeted with a welcome desk and adjoining waiting room for standardized "patients," who are essentially actors coached to present particular symptoms for students to identify and diagnose. Beyond this area are 20 exam rooms where medical students interact with patients for training and testing purposes, as well as an orientation and debriefing room, a monitoring/conference room, breakout rooms, offices, lounges and simulation labs, plus the newly established NEOMED clinical practice.

A clinical technology suite nearby provides NEOMED with dedicated space for telehealth and telepharmacy services. On the southwest quadrant of the floor is a large meeting room, which is available for all tenants' use.

'Industrial rural' design

Touring Bio-Med Science Academy's portion of the building, it's clear the design intent was to create a lively, stimulating and even fun learning environment. Two

sets of collaborative stairs are included in the school's design, one of which incorporates a custom-fabricated stainless steel slide that carries adventurous students from the fourth floor to a landing on the third floor below.

"There are interesting light fixtures throughout, open ceilings, sliding barn doors, a moss wall and certainly the furniture is not what you may find in a standard OFCC school," Chaplin says. "It was enjoyable to play with different elements of the architecture with open structure and introduce materials that might be a little more edgy than usual. There's a lot of natural reclaimed wood. During our initial interviews, the client mentioned the words 'industrial rural' several times and that became a driving theme in the design process."

Throughout the school, students will encounter classrooms divided by glass garage doors, labs furnished with modular desks and flexible seating, collaboration-friendly meeting areas and smaller study nooks, while a third-floor mini-stage encourages performances and informal gatherings.

When the school opened eight years ago, collaborative, experience-based learning was already a focus of the school's pedagogy, says Stephanie Lammlein, chief administrative officer/superintendent at Bio-Med Science Academy. "Over time, we have moved toward even more of an open concept model," she says. "Our students like to work together, so we needed spaces that could be transformed and used in a variety of ways."



NATURAL TOUCH A third-floor atrium incorporates nature-themed design details, such as a moss wall and a photographic wall mural, in addition to a skylight that allows sunlight to permeate the space.

With the opening of the new addition, the school's campus has more than doubled, now occupying over 70,000 square feet in total. Just as important as the physical growth, the expansion has allowed the school to broaden programming to better fulfill its mission, Lammlein says. "We're adding a lot of programs and courses for our kids," she says. "That's the biggest advantage overall and we're excited about it."

"Maybe the most challenging and also the most interesting aspect of the project

was the need to blend the rigidity of typical OFCC projects with some of the looseness and flexibility that Bio-Med was looking for," Chaplin says. "The school believes in the benefits of a collaborative learning environment, versus rigid seats in a classroom. They wanted to create spaces that are multi-functional and conducive to their type of learning. That came with some definite cooperation from the OFCC who understood what kind of school this was. It was challenging and fun at the same time."

Interestingly, several spaces within the school were designed in partnership with students. "Seniors at Bio-Med are required to enter an internship program or complete a specific project," Chaplin says. "There were a couple of students who had design flare and worked alongside us at times. They contributed some ideas for a few conference rooms, which we used. It was fun to work with them."

Positive outlook

"The project went well because we had a good team," says Hamm, of C.T. Taylor Construction. "We've worked with Hasenstab for several years now, which was beneficial, as was the fact that there was a lot of open, honest communication between us, the architect and the co-owners throughout the project."

Chaplin agrees, adding that the project was delivered on time and under budget. "It was a complicated project," he says. "It's forward-thinking and not cookie-cutter. You'd think that would result in high dollars, but that wasn't the case. We had significant bid-day savings that we were able to use and incorporate details back into the project as they became possible."

Feedback from students, faculty and the surrounding community has been overwhelmingly positive, says Dale Hluch, director of campus operations at NEOMED. "There have been a lot of positive comments about this project and I credit C.T. Taylor and Hasenstab with the project's success," he says. "Whatever challenges came up, they resolved them quickly and then they'd move on. It was a great partnership." **P**

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