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A case study describing site analysis, landscaping, team approach to design solution, space relationships, and an open space concept. An effort is made to bring technical-vocational departments to the forefront and eliminate wasteful corridor space in the process. The program is phased to meet financial limitation. (JS)

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ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES OF THE SOUTHERN NEVADA VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL CENTER

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The Southern Nevada Vocational-Technical Center rests on an exceedingly interesting site. Because it was government land, it was not in the high price bracket, and as a consequence there were some service and utility problems which, along with many others, had to be resolved. Many times an architect will get a nice wooded site, or a rolling one or a flat site. But here we had a truly virgin piece of ground. It stands high on a mesa about 100 feet off the valley floor, with no real problems except getting utilities to it and drainage from it. It originally amounted to 160 acres. Survey showed it to be flat to within one foot on the top.

There were other problems directly related to the nature of the site. For example, the wind could be blowing moderately in downtown Las Vegas, but fiercely out on the site. If it was 100 degrees in the city, it would be 120 degrees out there. On the other hand, if the temperature is down to 25 or 30 degrees in Las Vegas, it's probably another ten degrees colder on the site. So we found ourselves taking some unconventional approaches in solving many of these problems. But the unique and the different bring a kind of contagious excitement and enthusiasm to the project.

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The master plan called for around 600,000 square feet of building space. The first phase resulted in only about

200,000 square feet of usable space and we are just now entering the second phase which will be a bit smaller. Yet, in talking about a facility of this kind on a site with the weather conditions referred to above, we felt we had to take a different stance in developing the outside spaces as they are related to the inside ones.

As architects, we're one member of a large team. The educational consultants, the staff, the superintendent, the board, all form parts of this team and we all tried to work as closely together as possible. We agreed at the outset to appraise each other of the problems that each was encountering so that cooperatively we could solve them one at a time. The Student Center proved to be a very interesting illustration of this team approach because we were trying to take a different tack here. Typically, when vocational-technical facilities are combined with another type of facility, the academic requirements always take the front row: they're up by the library, they're out where everybody can see them; they're clean and pretty. On the other hand, the shops and the automotive area, and the air frame center are out in the back forty somewhere. We wanted to break this practice and bring those areas to the forefront. To do this everything was to be placed around the student center, making a free area for study, for eating, and for ready access to the various vocational-technical components. This was the theory with which we started very early. We resolved not to go outside to anything. As part and parcel of this attitude we

also tried to eliminate corridors. We have a few, of course, but very few and there has been no weeping for those absent hallways.

As you know, many of our new shopping centers are being developed in a manner that has a central mall. This is the type of structure we contemplated. The central mall is the structural center, where offices can be located and where various other functions can take place. It may be used as a lobby or an entrance to the instructional areas that form around it.

In turning to some thoughts on cost, I don't want to confuse the word economy with basic cost. I don't think the building was any less expensive because we used a special system, but we did get better use out of spaces because we can move any wall at any time with no more than maintenance personnel.

In a facility such as this one there should be places where students can go on a break and get a coke or maybe a quick snack. There should be places for faculty offices where instructors can have their work spaces and be apart from the students at times. There should also be an area where there are displays for the various disciplines and groupings.

We wanted to get rid of the common shops and replace them with instructional areas. We proposed an automobile agency approach to this program. Such an area can be for student classes, for displays, where students assemble an

automobile, or repair it, or otherwise put it in good condition. There can even be an automobile showroom in the lobby of the automotive area. One portion of it would be what one might call the automotive lab, and this is a clean area where clean equipment is used. The auto paint shop would be in a similar category. No one would ever confuse these areas with an old-time auto shop. These spaces open directly into the lobby. They're acoustically treated with carpeting throughout. If the instructor wants students to go to a central point, they can go right into the lobby by walking the shortest possible distance. There is no passing through many doors, hallways or corridors.

The student center area was conceived so that the library and its carrels, adjacent open spaces, classrooms around on the upper floor, and the faculty dining area would all be together. The upper balcony houses the culinary arts program and it permits students to prepare the food as well as to serve it, both in the interest of instruction. All the facets of the food program, from gourmet to snack shop, to serving, to dishwashing can be taught there.

Returning to the first phase of the program, because of money limitations, increment programming and all the other things that go with architecture and school production, available funds did not quite cover all of what we would like to do. So the first phase program was stretched permitting the student center to be completed. The library is being planned now, the automotive-technical area and air frame

area is to be connected by a covered walkway, which will be part of the second phase.

The materials resource center again is an extension of the open space concept. It is divided by levels so that you can see the materials but can't reach them except through a central desk control. While the area is controlled, it retains a feeling of informality. Within the material resource center is the audio-visual section which will also be a control center where students can come in and obtain materials that are passed over a counter. They can request audio-visual items or, with an intercom, they can dial control center for additional materials stored there. Dial access will give programming of a limited sort. When we get into the video system next year, we can also dial in and get a video program by means of a small TV monitor. This will also be housed in the control center, but will be distributed throughout the campus. Another area is the center platform pad. It is a general open reference area. Below it will be the periodicals with study carrels grouped around them. On all sides will be book stacks and small study areas. No area for study would hold more than 25 or 30 students. We think this is a good practice; it gets rid of the old long table study areas that have never been particularly conducive to good study. Small areas allow for limited social activity which does take place in the library. There will also be rooms within the library complex where typing can be done and where small group discussions can take place.

Returning once more to site problems, we had to orientate this project architecturally and esthetically to the ground available. There was no feasible way that we could introduce extensive landscaping. So we took the approach that we would run the desert right up to the school. With that in mind, we started developing some study models on how this was going to look. We wanted it to appear uniquely Nevada without seeming to have been transplanted from one of the New England states, or Southern California or somewhere else. From that decision on, the project began to develop a little architectural character. We tried to enhance this architectural character by taking some of the beautiful lava rock already on the site and blending it, in limited quantities, with walls for an esthetic effect. It's a nice rich chocolate brown and we used it to bring contrast to concrete tilt-ups. We are bringing in some small numbers of trees and coast landscaping, but beyond that we will utilize the natural terrain. Our impression is that we have brought together an interesting distribution of materials, colors, lines and textures, unlike anything we have seen elsewhere, which gives an atmosphere of dignity to the entire setting.