ANNA & JOHN J. SIE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS COMPLEX

Making Denver the Center of the Diplomatic World
By Joy Lawrance

The Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver (DU) is one of the world’s leading institutions in that field. With the completion of the Anna & John J. Sie International Relations Complex, its standing is certain to be elevated. The new building, made possible by a generous endowment from the Anna & John J. Sie Foundation, will help students grapple with challenges facing our often troubled world.

The lineage of diplomatic notables from DU includes Josef Korbel, a renowned diplomat and scholar in the field of international studies. His daughter, Madeleine Albright, served as Secretary of State, as did graduate Condoleezza Rice. John J. Sie, founder and former chairman of Starz Entertainment Group LLC, previously donated funds to build the Sie Chéou-Kang Center for International Security and Diplomacy in honor of his father, a distinguished Chinese diplomat, author and playwright.

A KEY ELEMENT

The building itself speaks to DU values, with its classic architecture and signature blue spire. A stately colonnaded entry leads to a foyer with an elliptical tile global view on the floor. The globe is accurately distorted and features a golden disk at the center marking Denver’s location, making note of perspective, a key element of diplomacy. University architect Mark Rodgers explains, “Whenever you stand, you
Christopher R. Hill, Dean of the Korbel School and four-time ambassador, feels that “A modern classroom building should not just be about classrooms. It should be about meeting, simulations and technology to connect people in different parts of the world. In diplomacy, you have to make decisions on the fly. This building is wired for that.” Teams of students take on roles of foreign governments getting information instantly. “They have to respond. It’s not just about listening to lectures,” he adds. They face issues such as political security, humanitarian aid, or crisis management.

VEHICLE OF LEARNING

Rodgers and architectural firm Anderson Mason Dale worked in concert, along with guidance from the Sie family. Rodgers explains, “We wanted to bring the community together more than it was. We designed it so we could move, create flexibility to group faculty and research students together around themes. We can allow those interested in the same fields to combine in one area.” He states, “Buildings are just vessels—they can hinder you, or they can speed you up. In the end, they rely on people. The building is a vehicle of learning.”

PANORAMIC VIEWS

In addition to classrooms there are spaces for reception and interaction with guests. Rodgers describes Maglione Hall, named for John Sie’s wife, “It can accommodate charitable events, sit-down dinners and lectures. It puts you at the top of the campus. Most other such spaces are ground floor, but this building puts it at the top, putting the campus bustle below you.” A sweeping curved balcony offers panoramic views of Denver, one that impressed recent guests from China hosted by Dean Hill. He adds, “The building enables us to host events and conferences and to bring people from outside here. In the past we had no place to host. I showed them where the mark on the [global tile] map was. We want to make sure we’re a top program. We’d like to go further. To do that we need to attract more foreign students.”

SUSTAINABILITY

The building is harmonious within the campus, using multi-century load-bearing stone masonry. Sustainability is key, as Rodgers explains. “We need to build them to last a long time. Brick masonry can withstand leaks and has a high thermal mass. We have the second highest number of freeze-thaw cycles that are hard on structures. This evens it out—it’s energy efficient.” The copper roof presents a prestigious appearance along with durability and corrosion-resistance. Technology includes Wi-Fi, videos, VOIP, and other needs that will aid students in the real world situations they will face during their careers.

LEED CERTIFICATION

At this writing, LEED certification has not been awarded, but Rodgers feels that they are well along on the path. Of the pre-requisites for certification, he relates that, “We expect to use over 20 percent of recycled materials, highlighted by the copper in particular which is 100 percent recycled. The design of the new building allows for daylight throughout (part of indoor environmental air quality). The building is expected to perform over 24 percent better than the baseline for energy performance. The landscape plantings and water fixtures throughout the building should reduce water consumption by at least 50 percent over a typical building.”

Dean Hill wants people to know that “They have one of the best international programs here. I feel that to be a global city we need a global education program. We want people to see Denver as a window to the world; to see us become one of the world’s best programs.”

Joy Lawrance is a freelance writer living in Golden. She writes frequently for the New West Publishing family of magazines.