Making the Connection -
Pedestrian Mall Helps Create Vibrant Campus Community

OVERVIEW
Mt. Aloysius College offers masters, baccalaureate and associate degrees on a campus that blends stately 19th century architecture with modern facilities, athletic fields and high tech capabilities. In the late 1990s, Mt. Aloysius administrators and trustees adopted a multi-phased campus master plan to facilitate an increase in enrollment, and move the school beyond its commuter college image and toward a more dynamic student environment that actively promoted residential living.

Early phases of the plan focused on peripheral roadway and parking improvements, upgrades and renovations to the student union, and new residence hall construction. A later, key phase included the design and construction of a centralized pedestrian mall to link buildings across the 165-acre campus, as well as the development of a new competition-level, Division III baseball field. The expansive, student-friendly walkway would replace the main road that cut through the hilly campus, effectively removing the last vestiges of an internal roadway system that had contributed to Mt. Aloysius’ long-time perception as a come-and-go college.

THE CHALLENGES
As the primary architecture and engineering firm for the long-term campus improvement project, L.R. Kimball entered this phase with a solid understanding of project goals, a strong working relationship with college officials and expertise in educational facility design. The team also entered the project ready to resolve an array of site design issues, including:

- Overcoming a vertical drop in excess of 45 feet from the Library, designated as the western mall entrance, to the Administration Building, located at the eastern edge of campus
- Adhering to American with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines related to the design and placement of ramps and stairs that would connect the descending walkway to several adjacent campus buildings
Navigating a complex and permanent network of existing underground utilities, including steam tunnels, sanitary sewers, gas lines and electrical lines, that ran directly in the path of the proposed walkway.

However, the pedestrian mall had to do more than just connect buildings. Its design also had to bring to life one of the primary goals of the campus-wide master plan – to transform Mount Aloysius College from an automobile-dependent commuter college to an active, contemporary campus with a vibrant residential community.

THE SOLUTION

L.R. Kimball focused its efforts on the design and construction of an 800-foot walkway that would serve as a campus centerpiece and offer easy access to other pedestrian pathways leading to all campus areas. The walkway would also provide axial alignment between the Library and the historic Administration Building, which served as “bookends” for the pedestrian mall.

The project required a thorough and detailed analysis of campus context and topography prior to construction to evaluate the impact of extensive grade changes on project outcomes. The findings enabled the landscape architecture team to develop a comprehensive design plan that:

- Determined the best locations for ramps and stairways to link the pedestrian mall to several campus buildings
- Resolved access issues related to varying elevations between campus buildings and the mall
- Addressed the need to work with existing elements, such as underground utilities, that could not be changed without significant expense
- Improved campus wayfinding efforts by using pedestrian paths to direct students and visitors to campus buildings and landmarks
- Complemented existing campus architecture by successfully blending dignified 19th century design with 21st century simplicity and functionality
• Created a valuable campus asset characterized by:
  - Brick pavers with buff-colored concrete accents
  - Custom manhole covers with brick paver inserts that blended into the mall
  - Open plaza areas with benches, tables, trash receptacles and light fixtures that complemented campus standards as defined in the master campus improvement plan
  - Restoration of a Saint Aloysius statue that had fallen into disrepair and relocation of the statue from a non-descript campus corner to a place of prominence at the eastern end of the mall

As a result of the pre-construction analysis, the team did not encounter any unexpected problems and completed the project on time and within its budget parameters.

THE RESULTS

Replacing the primary campus roadway with a centrally-located pedestrian mall represented an important turning point for the college because it marked the first time in decades that students could safely walk from building to building without the disruptions and intrusions of steady automobile traffic. Students could now live on campus in any of the new or renovated residence halls and travel to any location on foot or on bicycles.

In addition, the mall and its network of connecting pedestrian pathways soon generated a continuous campus flow. Circulation patterns remained free of traffic and parked cars that had typically clogged the center of campus.

Administrators and faculty also began to notice that the tables, benches and seatwalls that dotted the mall were quickly becoming gathering places for students to meet, work on projects or socialize. Outdoor reading, relaxing and recreation opportunities that had eluded the college in years past were now becoming part of its fabric.

L.R. Kimball completed the project in 2006 and remains actively involved with Mount Aloysius College as it continues to expand and improve campus amenities.
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