

Fairfield Jesuit Community Center, a place for Jesuits engaged in varied apostolates at Fairfield University and Fairfield Prep, opens

Fairfield, Conn., December 14, 2009 – A new Fairfield Jesuit Community Center whose design balances the need for reflection among religious men with their gift for engagement and hospitality has opened on the Fairfield University campus. The eco-friendly building was conceived as an Apostolic outreach center for 27 Jesuits engaged in varied apostolates, and their colleagues, both at the University, Fairfield College Preparatory School and elsewhere. It also is home to 12 Jesuits.

“It combines a sense of reflection and peace – it is a place rooted in prayer and a sense of the sacred,” remarked Rev. Walter Conlan, S.J., rector of the Fairfield Jesuit Community, who helped shepherd the building from its early conception to its successful completion. The Center was built to look directly onto the Fairfield campus, as well as Bridgeport, a city long served by the Jesuit Community. “St. Ignatius always wanted us to see the world in different lights, from different perspectives.”

The last time the Jesuit Community gathered at the Center’s site, near Bellarmine Hall, was in the spring of 2008 when a St. Ignatius medallion was planted to sanctify the ground. The central campus location positions the Jesuit Community so that they are closer to the University and Prep.

As those instrumental in seeing the Center through from vision to reality looked on, University President Jeffrey P. von Arx, S.J. spoke of “bringing the Jesuit community into the heart of the campus.” “Students and Jesuits will literally cross paths,” Fr. Von Arx said in the Center’s ‘Great Room,’ which overlooks the Quick Center for the Arts and the Dolan School of Business. “I believe this will lead to new learning opportunities, and that new and as yet unforeseen opportunities for creative and collaborative engagement between the University and the Jesuit community will emerge as this new Jesuit Community Center comes to life.”

The Center is situated in such a way that from many of its rooms, people may feel as if they are sitting in a ‘treehouse,’ an often-used word to describe the facility. A grove of Centennial beech trees - intentionally saved and standing just feet from its foundation – surround it.

“It’s a place to perch, to sit and dream; stare at the stars while being rooted to the site and to reconnect with our Jesuit brothers in different parts of the world,” said Rev. Gilbert Sunghera, S.J., project advisor and assistant professor of architecture at the University of Detroit Mercy. He said the architects, New Haven-based Gray Organschi Architecture, were selected because they “carefully place their buildings in the landscape, and are sensitive to the impact the building has on natural resources.” They are, he said, “a team respectful of our sacred mission of education, and our goal to be good stewards of the Earth.”

The Center features a host of creative earth-friendly innovations, such as a geo-thermal heating and cooling system that will reduce carbon dioxide emissions, a garden roof full of sedum plants designed to cool the building and catch rainwater run-off, sustainable Cypress doors, floor-to-ceiling windows to let in natural light, bamboo floors, and recycled content from structural steel to carpets. Several of its most remarkable elements come from a 70-foot tall tree at the site that had suffered decay and needed to be taken down. The tree was milled into a sliding wall in the Great Room and a cross and altar in the chapel.

Strategically placed windows enhance the correlation between the inside and outside environments, while windows in the chapel are positioned so one can see the sky and treetops in an effort to enhance contemplation. “Every window frames something beautiful,” Fr. Conlan noted.

Paintings by Jesuits, faculty and students adorn the walls, and other art objects represent the countries where Jesuits work. For example, numerous African masks, brought over from the Thomas J. Walsh Gallery in the Quick Center, line a wall near the entrance. Although quite modern and bold in its appearance, the Center also contains links to the past, most notably in its altar stones that derive from every chapel on campus. The Center also includes spaces for meetings, programs, faculty and staff development, guests, and chamber music concerts. It is designed to accommodate a mixed generational community, with the possibility of an easy reconfiguration at a later date for University and Prep uses, if and when the Jesuit Community no longer requires this space.

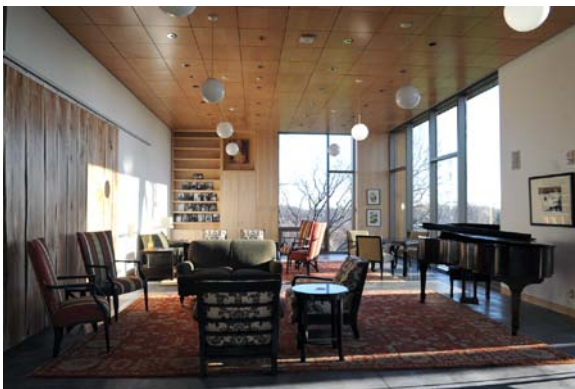
Photos by Jean Santopatre



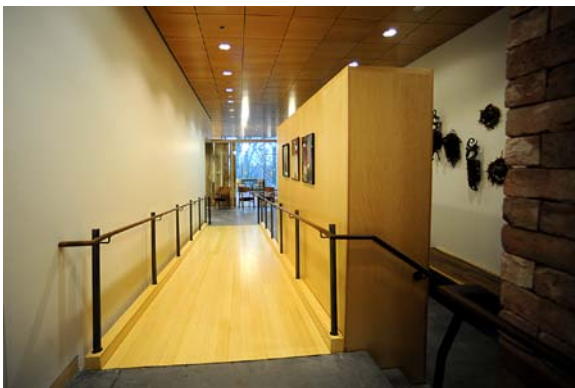
Caption 1: A new Fairfield Jesuit Community Center has opened on the Fairfield University campus.



Caption 2: The Center's chapel features a cross, ambo and altar made out of a decaying tree that had to be taken down. It also features altar stones from all the chapels on campus.



Caption 3: The Center's Great Room was intentionally positioned to look out onto the University and Fairfield Prep campuses, as well as Bridgeport, a city served by the Jesuits.



Caption 4: Art objects in the Center – including African masks in a hallway – represent the countries where Jesuits work. Eco-friendly elements, such as bamboo floors, were used in the construction.

Fairfield University is a Jesuit University, rooted in one of the world's oldest intellectual and spiritual traditions. More than 5,000 undergraduate and graduate students from 36 states, 47 foreign countries, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico are enrolled in the University's six schools. In the spirit of rigorous and sympathetic inquiry into all dimensions of human experience, Fairfield welcomes students from diverse backgrounds to share ideas and engage in open conversations. The University is located in the heart of a region where the future takes shape, on a stunning campus on the Connecticut coast.

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