Unveiling of USU Eastern Geary Events Center

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The unveiling of the $6 million renovation of Utah State University Eastern’s Geary Events Center showcased an unbelievably beautiful theatre, stage, dressing rooms and scene building addition on Jan. 17.

“It takes my breath away . . . it’s the WOW factor when I walk in,” said Corey Ewan, associate professor of theatre.

“I know it means more to me because as a student at CEU [College of Eastern Utah], I was part of every Geary Theatre production for two years in the early ’80s. After being away from it while earning my doctorate, I came back as a faculty member and the theatre was essentially the same. The roof still leaked, the seats were worn out and the sound system was terrible,” Ewan said.

It’s now completely outfitted with LED lights, a cloud-based-sound system, “silent” padded seats, scene shop, dressing rooms, storage area, green room, restrooms, roof and the list goes on and on. Essentially all that remains of the 1959 Geary Theatre is the skeleton of the building. Even the plumbing and electrical have been redone.

Aesthetically, The GEC is definitely one of the nicest on any college campus, Ewan said.

Chancellor Joe Peterson cringes at the cost of the remodel because the first estimates were between $2.5 and $3 million. “It seems like every time the workers started another section of the building, they would have to complete a major upgrade of the original building. The costs kept adding up, but the building we have now is state of the art.”

He is most excited about the HVAC system in the building. “The system has to be totally silent, no sound, no noise. You should be able to hear a pin drop when the system is running.”

An acoustical engineer designed the sound so that it reflects the same volume anywhere in the 515-seat theatre. By using a cloud system dropped from the ceiling, ¼-inch black felt lining the side walls and covered by wood slats plus a suspended drape system will deaden any reverberation of sound. The drapes can be raised and lowered to match the acoustic sound desired.

The roof of the theater was seismically unstable before the remodel. The entire roof was replaced and connected to the building reflecting today’s building codes.

Peterson said an ADA lift was added to the theatre stage and the foyer was rebuilt to be a continuation of the atrium of the Central Instructional Building.

The technology is associate theatre professor Brent Innes’ favorite part. “The sound is better than any theatre in the area and rivals theatres along the Wasatch Front.” He is excited to show educational films in the theatre for the USU Eastern community.

The new acoustical balance of sound will make Utah’s symphonies and band’s sound optimal in the GEC. With USU’s Year of the Arts program in progress, he sees the theatre hosting many out-of-town events including Odyssey Dance Company’s “Thriller” in October 2018. USU Eastern students are opening the GEC with “Guys and Dolls” in April and May, “Spamalot” in fall 18 and “Man of La Mancha” in spring ’19.

Innes designs and builds sets for plays in the Peterson Black Box Theatre and GEC. The original ’59 Geary Theatre had plans for a scene building shop that was never funded or built. Fifty-nine years later, Innes gets a scene shop.

Attached to the north wall of the GEC, with the brick façade matching identically to the ’59 brick the theatre was originally built out of, is a new addition where sets can be built and moved to either the GEC or Peterson Black Box Theatre stages. Innes added, “This definitely frees up space so other events can use the stage without theatre sets taking up the stage most of the time.

Innes sees the GEC becoming a bustling place on campus with dance, theatre, choir and concerts hosted in it. “It’s a big house and we have lots of plans for its use.”