

Building on a legacy of social service

By: Inka Bajandas in Architecture and Engineering November 26, 2014 10:15 am



(Scott | Edwards Architecture)

The 87-year-old **Louise Building on Albertina Kerr Centers'** Gresham campus has long served the nonprofit organization that serves clients with developmental disabilities and mental health challenges.

Scott | Edwards Architecture project architect Sarah Cantine was keenly aware of preserving and respecting the historic three-story brick building while designing a 4,000-square-foot addition to house Albertina Kerr's

children's mental health and foster care services. Instead of losing one wall, the 12,000-square-foot former maternity home for unwed mothers will remain intact. A window-lined hallway with a second-story sky bridge will serve as the connection between the original building and its east-side addition.

"It made a lot of sense to isolate the addition and separate it with a hallway to show off the old building and celebrate it," Cantine said. "When you work with an older building, (the challenge is) always finding that compromise between that new and older part."

Careful considerations to preserve the Louise Building and create a coherent addition are the best parts about the Scott | Edwards Architecture design for an estimated \$2.7 million renovation and expansion, said Pam Krecklow, Albertina Kerr facilities manager.

"All the ornateness of the building is on the exterior," she said. "It's a gorgeous piece of Georgian architecture. (The project) lets us save the east elevation of the building ... It's something that could very easily (have) been lost and it's one of the beautiful things about SEA's design."

Crews with Tualatin-based **Russell Construction Inc.** recently started construction on the project that includes a full seismic retrofit of the unreinforced masonry structure. The project, scheduled for completion next summer, is part of a larger effort to upgrade the nine-acre campus at 722 N.E. 162nd Ave., where Albertina Kerr has provided community services since 1915.

The work with an older structure has not been without challenges for the Scott | Edwards design team, Cantine said. The ornate facade makes the building appear larger than it actually is, and much of the interior design work involved improving access by widening hallways, replacing narrow stairwells and installing an elevator, she said.

"It's really actually a quaint, short building, so we've had to do a lot of gymnastics to make the circulation work," she said.

The building's original layout will largely be preserved with former bedrooms for expectant mothers being converted into employee offices, Cantine said.

"There's some very sympathetic usage going on," she said. "It's really quite nice."

The addition will nestle between the angled wings of the existing building so that the structure will have a trapezoid shape. A third-floor conference room in the original building looks out over the two-story expansion's green roof.

Scott | Edwards designers intentionally kept the expansion facade simple, Cantine said.

"We tried to keep it as quiet as possible," she said. "We really felt we needed to keep our materials really simple and have the original Georgian ones really sing."

This wasn't an easily conceived solution, especially given the prominence of the building in the surrounding community, Cantine said.

"It's a big challenge," she said. "How do you add onto something that's really truly loved by the neighborhood?"

The facade design was inspired by a nearby fir grove and features stripes of wood siding between a glass curtain wall, Cantine said. A large meeting and open office workspace in the addition will look out onto this wooded area.

"What we're trying to do with the addition is marry the fir grove with the building," she said. "We tried to keep the big open spaces pointed toward the grove."

Before Albertina Kerr leaders decided to vacate office space the organization leases near the **Portland International Airport** and consolidate services in the Louise Building, they considered demolishing the structure, leasing it or selling it, Krecklow said. She's glad the building will remain part of Albertina Kerr's campus, and praised the Scott | Edwards design as "a really elegant solution to a problem."

"It's really breathtaking what they've done," she said.

Louise Building renovation and expansion

Location: Albertina Kerr Centers' Gresham campus, 722 N.E. 162nd Ave.

Cost: \$2.7 million

Construction start date: fall 2014

Anticipated construction completion date: summer 2015

Owner: Albertina Kerr Centers

Architect: Scott | Edwards Architecture

Engineers: WDY Structural + Civil Engineers, Interface Engineering and Harper Houf Peterson Righellis

General contractor: Russell Construction

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