



An aerial shot of the new Penta Career Center in Perrysburg, Ohio.

COURTESY OF PENTA CAREER CENTER

Community Support Gives Rise to **NEW PENTA CAREER CENTER**

PENTA RELIED HEAVILY ON EXISTING SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT; BUT THEY ALSO HIRED A MARKETING RESEARCH COMPANY TO CONDUCT AN IMAGE AND AWARENESS STUDY, WHICH HELPED FOCUS THE CAMPAIGN EFFORTS.

By Michelle McCulloch

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FOR MORE THAN 40 YEARS, PENTA CAREER CENTER IN PERRYSBURG, OHIO, has successfully served thousands of high school students and adults from Northwest Ohio. Calling a converted 1949 United States Army Depot building home, Penta serves students from 16 surrounding school districts, and offers programs in six core areas: arts and communications; business and management; industrial and engineering systems; environmental and agricultural systems; health services; and human services. Seven years ago, with a growing high school student population as well as a thriving adult and continuing education program, Penta administrators began to realize that its facility was in need of significant upgrades and expansion in order to continue to meet the needs of its students. The building's deficiencies made it difficult



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for Penta to meet the academic benchmarks mandated by the Ohio Department of Education, and adapt to the advancements in career and technical education (CTE). In 2000, a leading educational facilities consulting firm confirmed the concerns of Penta administrators: the facility's programmatic goals could not be met without drastic changes. Financially, Penta was spending a large percentage of its budget every summer on maintenance to the existing buildings, and functionally, there was a major increase in the academic programs that Penta was to provide. This placed a demand for more integration of the academic and career-technical curriculum.

Community Support: A Partnership

In 2003, the Penta Career Center Board of Education hired the firm of The Collaborative/TMP Architects to provide professional services for the design development of the new facility, and to assist in a permanent improvement levy campaign for the construction of a new facility for Penta. Prior to the levy campaign, the design team partnered with Penta member schools' staffs, advisory committee members from business and industry, school administrators, instructors and community members in several vision planning sessions to gather input and support for the development of an appropriate design for the new center.

Again, partnerships were the key to success. The design team also helped in planning an aggressive levy campaign. The school touts its partnerships with local business and industry in its mission statement, and the design team realized that it was these same partnerships that would prove essential to the success of the permanent improvement levy campaign for a new center. Penta Superintendent Fred Susor said the process was smooth because of existing relationships. "Penta has strong support in the community—the community values what we do. People recognize that Penta has been in business for 40 years and that graduates are still living here in the community. Our business partners support us, the labor

unions support us, and our member schools support us."

An aggressive approach was launched to build visibility for a levy campaign. The design team worked collaboratively with the Penta levy committee to develop effective strategies to ensure the levy's passage. Susor remembers challenges in this early part of the campaign process. He said, "Our largest challenge was, how do you cover 1,000 square miles of 'district', and not just schools, but the community as well?" Penta relied heavily on existing small business support; but they also hired a marketing research company to conduct an image and awareness study, which helped focus the campaign efforts. A variety of communication tools were utilized to educate voters, including community forums, flyers, display boards, personal letters, yard signs and direct mail.

An Interactive Process

After Penta successfully passed its levy, an interactive design process followed. During this pre-design phase, the design team held numerous interactive sessions with Penta administrators and staff members to gain an understanding of the scope of Penta's mission and goals for the future.

"The building couldn't have been designed without staff input and still be functional," Susor said. "The design team gathered input from our staff, developed concepts, came back to us and showed us concepts, indicating how our input was incorporated. The new building will be a reflection of the input of about 250 people!"

The Collaborative/TMP's final design features a "center core" area surrounded by three wings. The three-story, glass-walled center core will be the focal point of the new facility, and includes a student commons area, 600-seat auditorium, multi-purpose room, culinary arts program, academic classrooms and a media center. Wings stemming from the core will house the school's CTE labs, in addition to adult education and board of education offices. The unique building



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Another perspective of the new Penta Career Center.

design provides for flexible space that can easily adapt to changes and expansion of Penta's career and tech programs.

Positive Results

The new 144-acre Penta campus, which is under construction and fifty percent complete, will be a model for environmentally sensitive design. Penta students will benefit from the surrounding natural wetlands during outdoor science projects and other related activities. Controlled daylight will penetrate all instructional areas, while the building's mechanical and electrical systems are designed to minimize energy consumption.

At 522,000 square feet, the center will be one of the largest of

its kind in the state, with a maximum capacity of 2,000 students. It will offer dramatic improvements in the use of technology, and infrastructure for technology such as wireless environments will be in place. A primary goal is to use technology as a learning aid to demonstrate vividly how technical systems are integrated into business and industry. Susor, his staff and area students are eager to set foot in the new facility.

"I'm looking forward to having a state-of-the-art school where young people can learn, and have pride in their career-tech programs," he says. "The new Penta Career Center will be a comfortable, safe, friendly place that is conducive to learning and inviting for both students and the community." **I**



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