

Construction of Towne Square gets passing grade from students

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As they meandered through a maze of partially painted drywall and glass windows, a small group of students observed Penn State Harrisburg's new food court with reserved interest. The east wing of the Olmsted Building's first floor looked a lot different the last time they saw it.

Greg Schiavoni, Assistant Director of Housing and Food Services, then pointed to a huge metal contraption in the corner. "This is the new pizza oven," he said. "We've gone to the best pizza places in the area and I know where they get their ingredients from. Now we can make our pizzas with the best ingredients."

Shortly thereafter, Director of Housing and Food Services Jo Ann Coleman said the words everyone wanted to hear. "We hope to have this done shortly after students return from Spring Break," she said.

The students were then ushered through the rest of the unfinished complex, which will eventually include a new coffee shop, three big screen plasma TV's, a 25 by 20 foot stage complete with a sound system for performances, an abundance of comfortable seating, and new offices for many of the most visible student clubs.

"I thought it was fantastic," said Matt Mosley, a worker in PSH's video lab. "It seemed to be very well put together. It's not really missing anything."

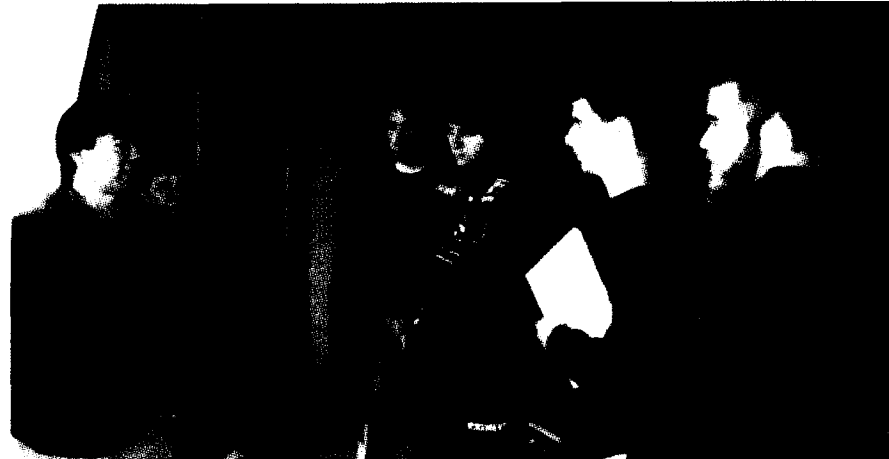
The students returned to *The Capital Times* office for an interview after the tour, where their reserved interest turned into outgoing excitement. "I thought it was fantastic," said Matt Mosley, a worker in Penn State Harrisburg's video lab. "It seemed to be very well put together. It's not really missing anything."

Others offered similar praise. "It was fantabulistic," said David Lynch, a communications major at Penn State Harrisburg. "It just looks like a very wonderful place. It was a really good use of space that made the place look a helluva lot bigger than it really is."

Mosley mentioned the 25 by 20 foot stage and the new coffee bar when asked about his favorite aspects of the new complex. "I like the idea of not having Wa-Wa or Turkey Hill quality coffee. It's gonna be good stuff," he said.

Lynch liked the inclusion of a DVD and CD player for students, located in the new student activities meeting room for clubs and student events. "I'm happy they're getting rid of Pizza Hut," he added.

There were only a few unanswered questions the students had, such as whether or not prices for food were going to be raised. Schiavoni said, in a later interview after the tour, no prices would be raised to help pay for the cost of the construction. "The prices will only rise to pay for better ingredients," he said. Schiavoni added that they have kept prices in the Lion's Den cafeteria "artificially low" because they understand that the selection of food is limited.



From left to right: Greg Schiavoni and Jo Ann Coleman show a group of students where the new coffee bar will be located. Behind the wall in back of them is the main lobby of the Olmsted Building. (Photo by Stacy De Angelo)

Another question was whether or not the target date of late March would be met. The demolition began in March of 2001, and this is not the first time a target date has been set for completion. Both Lynch and Mosley said it appears the construction crews have a lot of work to do, though they felt the target date was possible to meet.

Schiavoni and Coleman attribute missed target dates to their trial and error approach. Coleman said they did a lot of experimenting and if something failed to work as they had hoped, they would then try something different. Coleman added that they attempted to fix things as they came along, instead of rushing to meet a deadline, then trying to go back.

"We want to get it done just as much as everyone else wants it done," said Schiavoni. "If me and Jo Ann could grab a hammer and a chisel, we would." However, he added that they wanted it done right the first time and would not rush just to get the project completed.

Schiavoni said that the new complex was constructed to offer students a wide variety in foods, atmospheres, and places to sit. The goal was to provide the students with a place to hangout that would accommodate their diverse needs and interests. "It's this pressing campus issue. All we have is the lobby," said Schiavoni, who added that the new complex is going to help bring the Penn State Harrisburg community closer together.

Schiavoni said another goal was to have everything in one place. "We paid a lot of attention to the one stop shopping concept," he said.

In addition to the new rooms in the complex, the hours of the food court and coffee bar will be extended to better accommodate evening students and those who live on campus. Milk will be available to purchase, as part of the food court will resemble a mini convenient store.

"Everything looks pretty bad ass," said Mosley. "It looks like they're not skimping on it."



Outside of Towne Square before windows were installed in September of 2002. (Photo by Beau Faulkner)



A view of the library from inside the new food court. The picture was taken last week (Photo by Peter Strella)