

HUB

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will be celebrating its 50th anniversary this week, is a remarkably morphed version of the one that opened unceremoniously on Feb. 17, 1955.

More than 1,000 pieces of cake will be available on the ground floor of the HUB for today's birthday bash. And Penn State President Graham Spanier and Vicky Triponey, vice president of student affairs, will speak at the ceremony, slated to take place at about noon.

But what many students won't know, as they meander through to snag the goodies, is that they're taking in more than a piece of cake — they're taking in a piece of Penn State history.

IT WAS A LONG AND TRYING PROCESS for students and administrators to form the union building that we today call the HUB-Robeson Center.

The need for a legitimate student space arose in the early part of the 20th century, as student organizations expanded and need for study and meeting space skyrocketed.

Students were vocal, but not ram-bunctious, about their wants.

"While there were movements and activism, things weren't full of antagonism like they are sometimes these days," said Fredman, who later became a Board of Trustees member from 1976 to 1997. "Good sense tended to prevail."

The college didn't have the estimated \$4 million for such a building, making the temporary union building the most cost-effective option.

With the help of a \$10-per-semester student fee and private contributions, a new HUB would be made. Named after Penn State's 10th president, Ralph Dorn Hetzel, the building would soon become one of the highest-trafficked student union buildings in the nation.

Those who passed through the HUB's first floor 50 years ago would have seen present-day Alumni Hall as a ballroom, a vast space for dancing and dinner functions.

In 1973, Alumni Hall would host Penn State's first Interfraternity/Panhellenic Dance Marathon. Thirty-nine couples paid \$10 each to register and donated about \$2,000 to a state charity.

"For students today, the HUB has really become a central meeting point."

Stan Latta
director of union and student activities

Other areas have also changed. "On the first floor there was a music listening room and a reading room," recalls Bill Fuller, a 1948 alumnus who pushed for the HUB's construction.

Students were able to check out records and listen to them in small booths. There were also leisure books available for reading.

Fuller, who is now retired and living in State College, says the HUB has seen a plethora of changes.

"The HUB was nothing then compared to what it is today," he said. "But then it was really the best [student union building] of its time."

ONE THING SURE HASN'T changed since the 1955 opening of the HUB: College students are still sure-fire patrons when it comes to food.

That's why Louis Berrena, a manager of the HUB's food services during its opening year, said he had no problem getting up daily at 4:30 a.m. to head to the Terrace Room and the Lion's Den, part of the HUB's few eateries.

"As soon as I'd get to the kitchen, I'd fire up the stoves and start making fresh stickies and cinnamon buns," he said. "Students just loved those."

The stickies were as infamous as they are today. But some other food traditions have disappeared.

Berrena said the cafeteria wasn't allowed to serve blueberry pies on Fridays. Women feared the blue would stain their teeth, ruining their dates for the evening.

Lunch costs averaged about \$1.50, but entree options were few and far between.

Traffic picked up in the first few years after the opening of the Terrace Room and the Lion's Den, as the cafeteria started feeding between 800 and 1,000 students per meal.

Berrena was even in charge of serving sports teams such as the football team, which received all-you-can-eat meals because the athletic program

prepaid for its eating costs. This put an unexpected burden on food services, Berrena said.

"They ate so much you wouldn't believe," he said. "They'd go back for seconds and thirds and fourths."

Berrena said he worked 75 to 80 hours per week while managing food services at the HUB. He eventually moved to South Halls commons, before retiring after 30 years working at Penn State. His dedication to the business earned him fame, as Louie's in South Halls was later named for him.

The Terrace Room later closed and was replaced by the Penn State Bookstore, evidence that the student body's needs were continually changing — and that the HUB would compensate for their changing demands.

Despite earlier expansions and renovations, by the mid-1980s the HUB was already running at full capacity. The change ahead would transform the structure into a building that would set a precedent for many other student union buildings around the country.

"FOR STUDENTS TODAY, the HUB has really become a central meeting point," said Stan Latta, director of union and student activities who has been in his position for nine years. "It's a destination point, not just somewhere people are passing through."

Completed in 2000, the most notable of the latest additions nearly doubled the HUB's size.

Today's HUB ranks sixth largest among Big Ten schools and has one of the highest traffic counts of any student union in the country, Latta said.

More than 30,000 students filter through the building everyday — that's nearly 5,000,000 per year.

It's a number that will keep increasing as long as the student population keeps growing. But as for the future of the HUB, Latta says he is unsure.

"The use of the building is beyond what we've ever envisioned," he said,

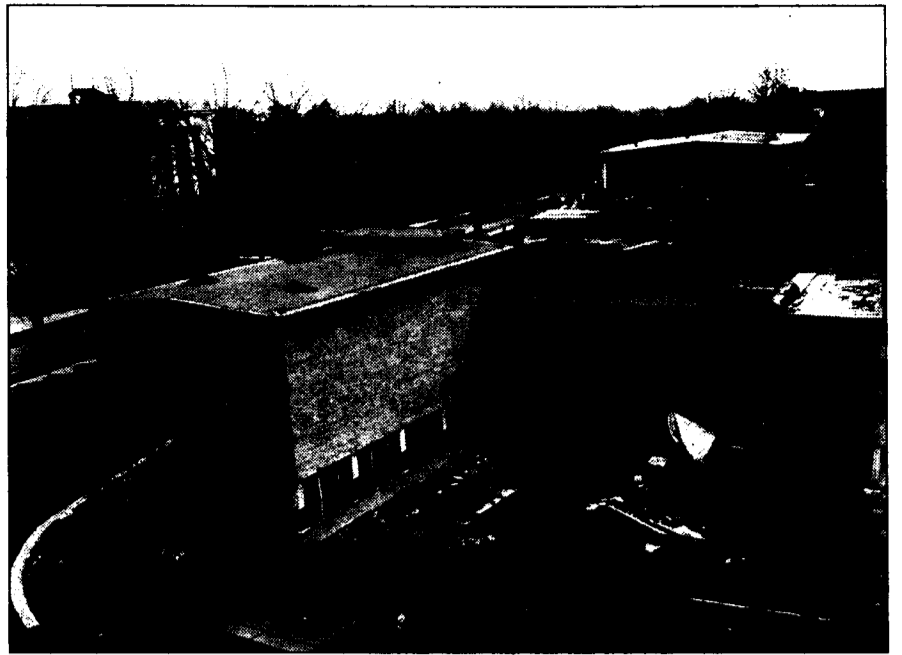


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An early rendition of the HUB-Robeson Center arose for students 50 years ago.

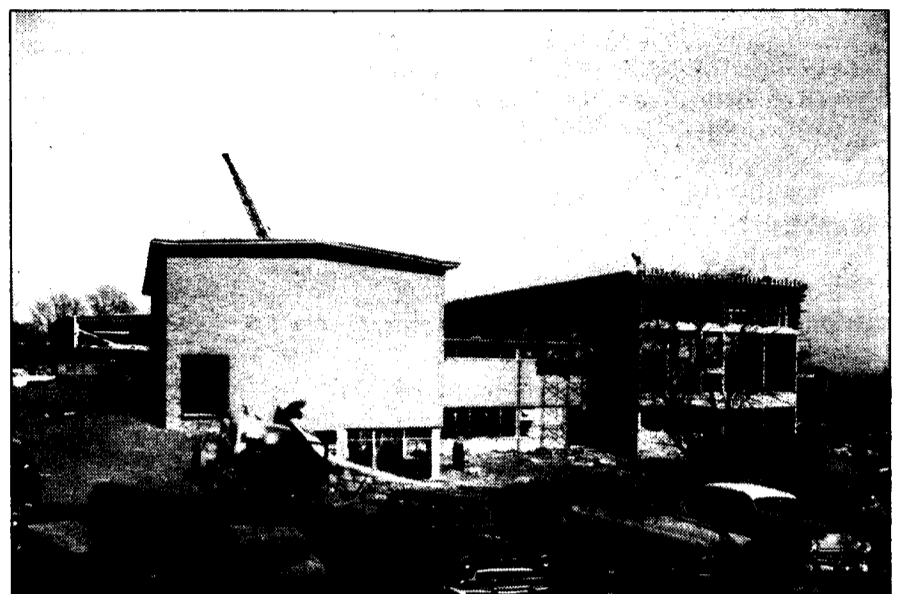


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A semester student fee and private contributions helped fund the \$4 million project.

"but we don't currently have any plans for expansion."

As for Fredman, who has lived and worked in the State College area since graduating in 1953, she has seen the HUB undergo its many makeovers and

says that she is very impressed.

"Today's HUB is just remarkable because it was always a dream to have it be something this special," she said. "It's terribly exciting to see it become the wonderful place it is today."

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