Student Life Center gets facelift, maintains integral purpose

As Spring Arbor University preps to dedicate the newly renovated and expanded Student Life Center, join us for a look back to when the original Student Center was constructed.

Spring Arbor broke ground on the new student center and commons in 1965, the same year the college graduated its first four-year class. It was constructed during a major growth spurt on campus and was officially completed and dedicated on Nov. 11, 1967.

The dining commons was built in honor of the Class of 1965 — whose seniors shared in the student initiative to give $50,000 over a three-year period for the student center. In 1974, the dining commons was renamed Dorrice Ogle Commons and dedicated in honor of a loyal university friend.

At the time it was constructed, the Student Center served a booming student population of around 700. It was built during a time of redefining what it meant to be a full-time student at Spring Arbor.

During that same time period, Spring Arbor completed a self-study asking itself, “Is student life on campus well-balanced and educationally meaningful?” The community aspect that defines campus life was still in the midst of reaching its potential. The construction of Kresge Student Center and several other new buildings including Hugh A. White Library (present-day Dietzman) and Lowell Hall, shifted the center of campus.

Renamed Kresge Student Center in 1978 in honor of Dorothy and Stanley Kresge, the building has since been home to many key offices on campus including the president's office, student development, campus safety, registrar's office, academic affairs and the switchboard.

After years of steady growth coupled with a period of rapid growth after 2000, it was clear the student population had outgrown the original facility. SAU held a groundbreaking ceremony for a $7.2 million expansion and renovation on Sept. 11, 2011.

“As a community of learners, Spring Arbor University recognizes that learning takes place in many venues. The Student Life Center is as much a part of the learning space for the university as are the classrooms,” says Dr. Charles Webb, SAU president. “While students may see the center as lounge space, administrators and faculty understand that creating an environment for disciplined reflection is crucial — a place where classroom conversations overflow into late night discussions in the Cougar Den, or where the game room becomes space for informal banter between faculty and students.”

As the hub of activity and student services at Spring Arbor University, expansion and improvements to the existing facility were essential to serve SAU students with excellence. The final touches were placed on the Student Life Center before students returned to campus in January. The building will be dedicated on May 9. Read more on page 14.