A New Home for the Nabb Research Center

By Rebecca Fischer

The Edward H. Nabb Research Center for Delmarva History and Culture—a humanities research laboratory with archival and exhibit space—recently relocated to its new home on the Salisbury University campus in Salisbury, Maryland. The Center now occupies nearly 20,000 square feet on the fourth floor of the university's new Patricia R. Guerrieri Academic Commons, an award-winning library, assembly hall, and home for student services.

The Nabb Research Center's location in the prominent new building has enhanced its profile as one of the premier institutions focusing on family and cultural history in the Delmarva Peninsula, which includes Delaware and Eastern Shore counties of the states of Maryland and Virginia. The Center, which opened in 1982, houses documents, letters, newspapers, books, maps, photographs, and artifacts from the past 150 years, while also offering lectures, seminars, and exhibits that chronicle the history of the region.

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The Patricia R. Guerrieri Academic Commons at Salisbury University is the new home for the Edward H. Nabb Research Center for Delmarva History and Culture.

Protecting Collections

Within its new accommodations, the Center has nearly tripled the amount of space for its collection of approximately 15,000 items, enabling staff to consolidate and organize items that had previously been stored in nearly two dozen locations scattered across the campus. The archaeology laboratory, archives, and exhibit areas are accommodated in temperature- and humidity-controlled spaces that are designed to protect the collections while providing a comfortable environment for staff and visitors. The architectural team of Sasaki Associates and Ayers Saint Gross, working with Mueller Associates for mechanical and plumbing engineering, designed the building, including the fourth-floor Nabb Research Center.

The 221,000-square-foot Patricia R. Guerrieri Academic Commons is a four-story, LEED®-Gold structure, designed to be a hub for students and visitors to the campus. Nearly four times the size of the university's previous library, the building features classrooms, group study rooms, individual study areas, a 400-seat assembly hall, and meeting space. A full-height, skylit atrium provides a dramatic gathering space at the center of the building, while a 20,000-square-foot green roof reduces runoff and helps with interior cooling.

The Nabb Research Center, which is open to the public, was intentionally located on the top floor to ensure that the building would be active throughout all four floors. The Center includes a reading library, offices, and support space, as well as the archival storage area and laboratory. The assembly hall, located on the top floor, across from the Center, facilitates larger events and features intelligent lighting, theatrical lighting, and digital-audio networking. The entire fourth floor offers expansive views across campus.

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The Nabb Research Centers houses approximately 15,000 items within an environmentally controlled space.

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A monumental stair within the full-height atrium leads to the Nabb Research Center.

The Mueller team engineered the archival and laboratory spaces to meet stringent standards for environmental controls. The archival space is maintained at 65°F and 40% RH year-round, while the laboratory is maintained at 68°F to create a balance between protecting artifacts and providing a comfortable environment for staff. The sealed exhibit cases—which showcase a range of documents and artifacts, including period furniture—are also actively maintained at carefully controlled standard for temperature and humidity. Mueller's mechanical design for these spaces included a dedicated air-handling unit with an active desiccant wheel to help meet dehumidification requirements.

The reading library, offices, support spaces, and exhibit spaces also have specific temperature and humidity controls. While the environmental conditions are not as stringent as the archival and laboratory spaces, the air-handling unit dedicated to these spaces has sophisticated controls to ensure that temperature and humidity set-point changes are gradual through the spring and fall seasons, to preserve the materials in use and on display.

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The new space is nearly triple the size of the Nabb Research Center's prior home on campus.

Welcoming the Public

The Patricia R. Guerrieri Academic Commons, including the Edward H. Nabb Research Center, is among several projects that Mueller Associates has engineered on the Salisbury University campus. "The university has been visionary in its capital planning and development over the past several years," says Todd Garing, PE, LEED AP BD+C, a Mueller vice-president and principal-in-charge for the academic commons. "This project not only reflects the university's focus on creating an optimal student experience, it embraces a high level of sustainability throughout the design and construction. With the inclusion of the Nabb Research Center, now in a state-of-the-art setting, the building also serves as an important resource for the community."

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