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Wausau Curtainwall and Sunshades Help Michigan's Grand Valley State University Maximize Energy-Efficiency

Wausau, Wis. – Greeting the first of its 1,500 students in the autumn of 2003, Grand Valley State University's new Cook-DeVos Center for Health Sciences features a 90-foot-tall, energy-efficient curtainwall and sunshades from Wausau Window and Wall Systems®.

The Cook-DeVos Center for Health Sciences is the newest addition to the university's downtown Grand Rapids campus on the corner of Michigan and Lafayette streets. The \$57.1 million, six-story, 215,000-square-foot facility houses all of Grand Valley's health-professions programs and research, while allowing room for future health education offerings.

An icon for the region, the building was envisioned by local architectural firm Design Plus with early input from Wausau and close involvement with glazing contractor Architectural Glass and Metals, Inc. (AGM) of nearby Byron Center, Mich.

"Western Michigan does not have a lot of multi-story glass buildings," explains AGM's vice president Bob Mack. "This is an important and beautiful building for our area, and a key reason for that impression is its large glass atrium."

"The building's image and tone are set here," says Design Plus architect and project manager Craig Nicely. "It is desirable to provide a lot of transparency in the new facility for good visibility and lots of natural light, as well as to promote a sense of invitation, accessibility, welcomeness and openness. The facility needs to support, foster and help reinforce a collaborative, interactive health care culture and environment."

Nicely adds that the 7,600-square-foot lobby atrium draws from its urban setting and brings the feel of outdoor open space enclosed with the Center. This grand entry serves as "not only an oasis, but also an invitation to those outside." For those inside, it offers a "people can see and be seen, can anticipate and feel secure."

To accommodate the atrium design, special attention was given to balancing aesthetics with performance considerations. According to Design Plus' Russ Hinkle, the building team met these challenges with a complete, systematic approach that aided in reducing HVAC loads, managing energy demands and maintaining occupant comfort.

Wausau provided AGM's installation team with a custom, 90-foot-tall unitized curtainwall system and interlocking sunshade assembly. Wausau regional sales manager Les Raboin says, "The combination of thermal improvements, high-performance glass and the airfoil shaped sunshades significantly reduces heat gain in the building."

"It's a very aesthetically pleasing system, too," notes Mack. "The sunshades and aluminum framing system are finished in an off-white that contrasts beautifully against PPG's aquamarine Azurlite glass."

Mack also praises the “exceptional fabrication, tight joinery and pure connections” of Wausau’s curtainwall and sunshade system that helped his team overcome “many challenges including a tight downtown metropolitan jobsite with multiple constraints and critical interface conditions between glazing systems. All exterior cladding materials were installed simultaneously within very tight tolerances to ensure proper installation of key interface details.”

He continues, “Wausau’s project team did a great job walking us through the whole process so we knew what we were getting ourselves into. They provided good installation instructions and were well organized. All of this contributed to smooth installation and helped us win an award for craftsmanship from the Western Michigan chapter of Associated Builders and Contractors.”

Beyond industry accolades, Cook-DeVos Center for Health Sciences’ fundraising campaign director Karen Loth calls the building a “beautiful new facility” offering “cutting edge health programs to West Michigan.”

Architect and project manager Craig Nicely notes that the 37,000-square-foot of glass within the building allows students and staff to feel connected with the downtown community and to the nearby major health care providers and research institutes. The Center will comprise a 150-seat auditorium, 30 teaching and research labs, 18 wireless conference rooms, 24 classrooms and seminar rooms, 200 faculty offices and a food service area. Two levels of parking also are located under the building.

As part of the Grand Rapids SmartZone, the top floor of the building has dedicated 30,000-square-foot as life science incubator space. Academic programs that operate at the new facility include the School of Health Professions, the Kirkhof School of Nursing, and the African American Health Institute.

Nationally recognized for its innovative expertise, Wausau Window and Wall Systems is an industry leader in engineering window and curtainwall systems for commercial and institutional construction applications. For 50 years, Wausau has worked closely with architects, building owners and contractors to realize their vision for aesthetic beauty and lasting value, while striving to maintain the highest level of customer service, communication and overall satisfaction.

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