

Massive Thorvaldson project marks milestone

By Colleen MacPherson

With the official opening of the Saskatchewan Structural Sciences Centre (SSSC) Sept. 12 in newly-renovated quarters, the mammoth Thorvaldson project is now one step closer to completion.

Started about five years ago with an original cost pegged at about \$36 million, the project has included new construction - the Spinks Addition to Thorvaldson and the Chemical Engineering addition to the Engineering Building - along with renovation to, among other areas, both the 1924 and 1966 wings of Thorvaldson, the Thorvaldson Annex and the library in the Geology Building. Here, the collections of Geological Sciences, Physics, Chemistry and Pharmacy and Nutrition were brought together into what is now called the Natural Sciences Library.



The original Chemistry Building, built in 1922-24.

Chemistry, is currently in the design stage with a review of contract documents underway, he said.

And while inevitable planning snags, construction delays and regular shifts in projected opening dates often left the University architect feeling "like a pinball", Colin Tennent is more than pleased with the results.

In addition to the state-of-the-art SSSC space, Tennent said the new home of the Department of Chemistry in the Spinks Addition of Thorvaldson is "unsurpassed in Canada". The majority of the department has moved into the ground, first and second floors of Spinks while the third floor is dedicated to Computer Science. The fourth floor, also earmarked for

With the Spinks project running about four weeks behind schedule, priority was given to completing labs with high usage in time for the start of the fall term, said Tennent who is Director of Architectural and Engineering Services with Facilities Management Division (FMD). That means a few research labs are still in need of "some spit shine".

Now, the focus turns to the 1924 wing of Thorvaldson, or what was the original Chemistry Building. Vacated by Chemistry, three floors of the wing are scheduled for complete renovation to eventually accommodate Computer Science, which is now operating from various locations around campus.

Rick Kalenchuk, project manager for the \$6-million renovation, said the tender for roof replacement has been awarded although work has been slowed somewhat by the need for asbestos abatement. Asbestos was found in a concrete product when the roof of the Annex was upgraded, and a check of the original plans showed the same product in the 1924 wing. The remaining tenders on the project will go out the weekend of Sept. 20, he said.

The renovation involves 17,000 square feet and will include a completely new ventilation system, new wiring and an elevator replacement. The biggest challenge, said Kalenchuk, will be maintaining the heritage character of the building. To that end, bricks, interior doors and transoms will be re-used.

The refit is expected to be finished by September of next year.

With some 16 sub-components, the huge Thorvaldson project has tested the ability of the University and the local construction sector to undertake construction and renovation work of this scale. The logistical challenges become readily apparent when one part of the project falls behind schedule. The result is a domino effect on the rest of the project, although Tennent said it is "difficult to point at one or two or three things and say these caused the delays" on Thorvaldson.

As work progresses, the fact the University is "a dynamic organization with many interests" comes into play, as does the changing scope within different projects. There are also the on-site surprises, like the asbestos in the roofs "which no one knew about until we started opening up the roof of the Annex".

The Spinks project also ran into what Tennent termed "outstanding geo-technical challenges" with underground aquifers. In simple terms, "There's a lot of water down there, and we ran into it."

Looking back to the start of the project, Tennent pointed out that Facilities Management had not had a major job "come across their board" for about 10 year, the last being the Agriculture Building, "and we didn't anticipate just how much things would take off." (In addition to Thorvaldson, FMD was also handling the new Kinesiology Building which opened in late August.)

It takes time, he said, to mobilize the necessary resources within the division, "but we also found that the local consulting community was not ready for this. These projects really taxed the consulting base in Saskatoon, and throughout the province, beyond its capacity."

Tennent also pointed out "there are only so many mechanical or electrical sub-contractors" available at any one time, and although schedules are laid out to avoid peaks in demand, delays send those schedules out the window.

With Kinesiology now virtually done and Thorvaldson progressing, there's still no time to relax at FMD. Tennent said there are always projects in the planning stage - like renovations to the Williams building and work to "remedy some of the ills" in Kirk Hall - but, he added, "money is the big thing". Projects in the development stage include construction of the parkade near Griffiths Stadium, which is expected to begin this fall, and renovation of the College Building (tenders close this month).

FMD is also gearing up for a multi-million-dollar upgrade and expansion of clinical, research and diagnostic facilities at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine. Tennent said it is a project that will compare in complexity to Thorvaldson, but "we're ready for that now", thanks in part to both two things: the Core Area Master Plan which details principles and guidelines for future campus development; and Integrated Planning.

"The Integrated Planning process, despite the fact it's a very large and complex undertaking, has led to a degree of order and a clear direction that Facilities Management can react to. It has also resulted in a high degree of integration, communication and resource allocation", all good things as Tennent and FMD try to keep numerous balls in the air at once.

And despite the delays, surprises and logistical headaches, Tennent takes great pride in helping provide for the space needs of the U of S.

"It's quite thrilling to see these programs, like Chemistry, now able to fulfil their potential."