



# Civic Employees Legacy Tower (CELT) – NorQuest College

by ROBIN BRUNET

For many staff, faculty, and students, it's as if it has been standing tall forever, but the Civic Employees Legacy Tower (CELT) is really a renewal to NorQuest College in Edmonton; and together with the new Singhmar Centre for Learning (SCFL) forms a welcoming entry to this fast-growing institute of higher learning.

In fact, both SCFL and CELT were critically important projects, the former (which opened late last year) being the first expansion of the college in nearly five decades. As Jodi L. Abbott, NorQuest's president and CEO, explained to media in early 2018, "From 2013 to 2017, we have become a first choice institution, increasing our student population by 72 percent from 10,220 learners to the 17,592 we have today."

The original building that would become CELT had gained a reputation for being outdated in its delivery of education, with closed off and inefficient spaces evident in each of its eight levels. But instead of demolishing and beginning anew, NorQuest College determined that only a thorough renovation of the interior was required.

Tracey Didluck, project manager for the University of Alberta/NorQuest College, explains, "The building was a typical 1970s Edmonton tower in that it was an extremely well built concrete structure, but it had received a series of renovations that closed off a lot of floors, contributed to a confining atmosphere, and resulted in inefficient spaces. Our goal was to open everything up, make everything brighter, improve flow, and maximize occupancy." The renovated interior would accommodate multiple classrooms, laboratories, and an innovation studio, as well as staff and faculty offices.

Didluck adds that the development of SCFL, although completed on time and on budget under a fixed price contract

with PCL, "led us to the realization that a construction management delivery would better accommodate the flexibility required to renovate an occupied facility with a deconstruction/reconstruction strategy driven by the decant limitations and expanding functional program enrolment."

After extensive preparation, the college and GEC decided to break the project into two phases, with the first phase consisting of stripping floors four, five, six, and seven down to the concrete structure. "Since CELT was government funded we were obliged to commit to a fairly tight schedule," says GEC partner Peter Osborne. "Essentially, we spent a great deal of effort finding extra space in the floor plans, ways to activate the stairs, and strategies to take pressure off the elevators, while at the same time opening them up."

GEC associate Lacey Pearn adds, "One restriction was that we couldn't change the eight-foot ceiling heights of each level to any great degree, because it was determined early on that the mechanical systems would remain intact."

Originally, each level had two completely enclosed corridors, and this, along with scissor stairs made things very disorienting for people, says Osborne. "By comparison, our design featured student lounges with access to exterior windows and active corridors, which helped bring natural light deep into the facility."

Not all the design choices would require massive demolition and reconstruction. "We kept the scissor stairs and colour coded them for better wayfinding," says Pearn, to which Osborne adds, "Colour was an important part of our design approach. For example, each student floor has a feature tile wall 35-feet long and nine-feet tall, this being the first thing people would see

when they stepped off the elevators. The wall tiles would be arranged in a herringbone pattern, with different coloured accent tiles for each level acting as a subtle form of wayfinding."

Careful attention was paid to material selection. "We used lots of textured fabric, large wood tiles, white walls to offset colours, and a repetition of the herringbone pattern in frostings and screenings to create lively spaces that would be sophisticated – rather than the kitschy ambiance seen in many college buildings," says Pearn.

Lighting played an important role in helping create a sense of space. "We installed LED uplighting on top of the lockers in the corridors, aimed at the ceiling, and this helped enhance the perception of volume," adds Pearn.

Didluck notes that the construction of SCFL had included a grand entrance that would eventually connect both buildings at the main and second levels (the latter achieved by a walkway). This inspired GEC to create a main interior common space for CELT as a physical connection to the new entrance.

Chandos Construction began the first phase demolition in 2017 following an elaborate and meticulously planned decant of students to the lower levels. "A lot of the work was done at night to minimize disruption, and we used a loading dock as a staging area, with three to four bins at a time taking the debris from the upper levels," says Didluck.

David Addison, project director, Chandos Construction, says among the many challenges facing his crew was "the replacement of all the windows – 700 in total – in their existing frames with clearer, high-performance glazing. This had to be completed by April of 2018, and thanks to careful preplanning we were able to go in and replace each one in about an hour's time."

Addison adds that BIM modelling was used to avoid clashes during construction, "and this combined with other systems has enabled us to work consistently. Downtime on this project simply isn't an option."

Derek Ciezki, partner, SMP Engineering, was charged with upgrading and replacing as well as developing all the electrical and technical systems. "We brought in a cost consultant to preside over everything we did," he says. "The challenges are numerous in part because all the mechanics and electrical tie in with the Singhmar Centre; plus, systems such as fire safety haven't been substantially upgraded for decades."

As of October of 2018, work crews had commenced phase two and were demolishing a portion of the basement. "Thanks to careful planning and great communication between all parties, we remain on schedule and have not run into any major roadblocks," says Didluck. "Looking ahead, we're very excited about the role the completed project will play in enhancing the profile of NorQuest College." **A**

**LOCATION**  
10215 108 Street NW, Edmonton, Alberta

**OWNER/DEVELOPER**  
NorQuest College

**ARCHITECT**  
GEC Architecture

**GENERAL CONTRACTOR**  
Chandos Construction

**STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT**  
Entuitive

**MECHANICAL CONSULTANT**  
AME Consulting Group

**ELECTRICAL CONSULTANT**  
SMP Engineering

**TOTAL SIZE**  
236,698 square feet

**TOTAL COST**  
\$40 million (projected budget)