

The Pueblo Chieftain



Adams State University unveiled a \$16.9 million renovation Tuesday of Richardson Hall, the school's first and oldest building.

CHIEFTAIN PHOTOS/MATT HILDNER

HIGHER EDUCATION

Adams' foundation comes full circle

University's first structure like new after \$16.9 million renovation

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ALAMOSA — The first building on Adams State University's campus has stood for 90 years and school officials and community members hope a \$16.9 million renovation will keep it standing for 90 more.

Now the school's main administration building, Richardson Hall was unveiled to the community Tuesday with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The renovation has left the 75,000-square-foot building replete with modern heating, ventilation and computing systems, while also preserving its historic features.

But it was left to the school's alumni to talk about the roots running out from the three-story, red-brick building that was originally built to train teachers for the San Luis Valley and rural Colorado.

Arnold Salazar is a 1976 graduate who now chairs the school's board of trustees.

The board backed the project, he said, “as a recognition of our past, a strong history, a history of rural Colorado where we were not satisfied with not having a first-class institution for higher education.”

Adams State alumnus and state Rep. Ed Vigil, D-Alamosa, recalled how he had spent his childhood summers just a few yards from Richardson while his parents worked toward their degrees in education.

“I have very, very early memories of this place,” said Vigil, who, as a state lawmaker, was involved in the fight to get the building funding.

Alamosa Mayor Josef Lucero, a 1980 graduate, also lived on campus as a child in the 1950s.

His father, who would go on to become superintendent of the South Conejos School District, came to Adams on the GI Bill.

“He was a work-study janitor in these halls right here,” Lucero said, recalling that he often skidded along behind his father on the red powder used to buff Richardson’s floors.

Despite those ties, the quest to restore the building was not easy.

Funding for Richardson came from state lawmakers only after a decade of pestering by school officials and their allies at the Capitol.

“Some of the best pests in this regard are here today,” President Emeritus David Svaldi said. “About to retire — Vice President Bill Mansheim was one of the best pests I know.”

That funding went toward a building that was as worn down on the exterior as it was outdated inside.

A crumbling brick facade required protective overhangs for pedestrians, while peeling paint left bare the building’s metal cupola.

Inside, the building’s heating, plumbing and electrical systems suffered from decades of use.

And the building, which is located in one of the coldest parts of the state, had no insulation.

“It appeared as if the building was on its last legs,” said Tyler Read, who was the project manager for general contractor GH Phipps Construction.

The renovation has eliminated those problems, while maintaining the building’s historic character.

“That guided every design decision throughout the process,” Read said.

The overhaul also added 11,000 square feet of offices and meeting space to what had once been an unusable and seemingly unimprovable attic on the building’s third floor.

“You couldn’t walk 10 feet without running into a structural column that supports the roof,” Read said.

That Richardson Hall has lasted and been reborn despite funding struggles and its wear and tear is fitting to the school’s history and its ties to the valley.



School and community officials laid the cornerstone for the hall in 1923. When the college opened its doors to students in 1925, it was the only building on campus.

COURTESY PHOTO/ADAMS STATE UNIVERSITY

Svaldi noted that during the school's first year, the Legislature, then dominated by the Ku Klux Klan, had blocked the school's operating budget.

Despite the strong backing of state lawmaker and eventual Gov. Billy Adams, the San Luis Valley's residents were left to make sure the fledgling school stayed open.

They sold potatoes and livestock to raise the necessary funds.

The building would later avoid the wrecking ball when plans to build a new administration building next to Nielsen Library were mothballed.

"Somewhere, I think, Governor Adams and President Richardson are smiling," Svaldi said.

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At left: **Visitors admire a mural in the hall's Luther Bean Museum.**

At right: **The hall's auditorium received new seats, curtains and acoustic improvements as part of the renovation.**