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North Star Guides Work on a New Home for Center for Character and Leadership Development

It is a campus unlike any other: Set against the beauty of Colorado's mountains, a natural backdrop that is all about vertical drama, the buildings of the U.S. Air Force Academy are low-slung and solid, strong horizontal masses that could only be made by human hands.

Decades of planning – and controversy – drove the birth of the final major service academy constructed in this country. It was designed to fit its century and well into the future. The architecture firm that designed the early, important buildings there set a tone that did not try to emulate the Collegiate Gothic or Neoclassical styles that define so many college campuses. Instead, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) was known for its Modernist sensibilities – clean, sharply detailed buildings that relied on mastery of materials rather than overt decoration.

From the cadet dorms to the academic buildings that served the academy when it opened in 1958, SOM's work looked to the future, crafted in concrete, glass, and aluminum. The chapel – spiky and clad in aluminum – seemed to reference the aircraft that students were being taught to master.

In the years since, other architects have worked on the Academy campus, but in 2012, SOM returned with a dramatic design for a building to be sited at the heart of the much-admired Cadet Area, which was designated a National Historic Landmark District in 2004: a Center for Character



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and Leadership Development, or CCLD, which embodies the academy's vision for developing leaders of character for the academy, the Air Force, even the nation. Although a national design competition was considered, there was not time for that process; instead, the academy asked that three SOM offices produce competing designs, and a jury and advisory committee were named. The winning design emerged from the New York office.

Though only 46,000 square feet (small compared to nearby Vandenberg Hall's mega 995,000 square feet of cadet dorm space), the CCLD will stand out for its design elements and its intent. The transparent glass and aluminum skin will be topped by a canted, 105-foot-tall, 460-ton skylight that is shaped like the tail of an airplane, soars

into the air, and aligns with Polar, the North Star. Below, the building will feature a polished concrete floor, conference and glass-walled break-out rooms, offices, a gathering place called the Forum, and the Honor Board Room. In this crucial space, a cadet accused of committing an infraction of the academy's Honor Code will sit in a location that is in line with Polaris through an oculus at the top of the skylight. He or she will be in Polaris' sights, and the academy's, so that True North leads the way.

"Polaris has always been a symbol of how people have navigated," said Duane Boyle, Campus Architect and Deputy Director of Installations for the Air Force Academy. "It's also a symbol of how you travel through your life."

For the first time, the center will house all of the academy's programs concerning character and leadership in a single facility – at the heart of the campus and in a building that carries symbolic weight. The Scholarship Division, Character and Leadership Education Division, Honor Division, and Capstone Events Division will operate out of the center, coming together as a community. The Center was founded in 1993 as a focal point of the academy's commitment to developing leaders for whom integrity is woven into all aspects of cadet – and, later, graduate – life.

"The CCLD program is the academy's No. 1 program," says Boyle. "The building had to be

well-integrated into the cadet area and at the intersection of where cadets travel and the public travels." The center will be the venue for hands-on, interactive discussions on character and leadership development and major national symposiums, and will become a national think tank for discussions of integrity and the concept of leadership.

The team working on the \$40 million CCLD broke ground for the project in late October 2012. It is the first building to be erected on the Terrazzo of the campus since 1981, and located on a prominent and tight site. GH Phipps is working with ECC, a major international federal contractor on the project, and providing field supervision as well as concrete services for the project. The CCLD builds on the list of projects Phipps has completed for the academy, including the Association of Graduates South East Asia Pavilion, the Memorial Pavilion, the Cadet Gym Modernization, and renovations at Vandenberg Hall.

The CCLD project is supported through both government funding as well as the USAFA Endowment, which generously provided funding for project enhancements such as the skylight. The project team is aiming for LEED Silver certification. Topping out is expected later this month, with completion expected in late April.