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Prellwitz Chilinski Associates designs Westfield State library renovations: Evergreen Construction serves as general contractor for 15,000 s/f phase 1

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Westfield State University (WSU) held an official ribbon cutting at Ely Library to celebrate the completion of 15,000 s/f phase one renovations at the facility. The University's president, Evan Dobbelle, and library director, Tom Raffensperger, opened the library to students, faculty, and staff. The renovation of the facility was initiated to better serve the needs of the students and faculty, as well as offer a learning environment that is technologically and functionally integrated.

Evergreen Const. Corp. is the general contractor.

Designed by architects Prellwitz Chilinski Associates (PCA), phase one renovations (of two phases) included an overall scope of reorganizing the library departments for improved student and faculty access. New group study rooms were created along with 56 new computer work stations, creating a varied selection of seating and group gathering spaces within the library. The design relocated the main circulation reference and educational reference center to the entrance, alongside the computer work stations. This allowed for the centralization of high-activity space at the front of the library, and quiet-activity space in the more suitable rear of the building. Features includes new carpeting, furniture, finishes, millwork, a wood-patterned vinyl floor entry, and new circulation counters which all lend to a warm, brightened student and faculty experience.

"Since libraries are becoming group social centers, we utilized our experience in designing dining halls and campus centers and applied it to what a library has become. This design elevates the social, interactive, and collaborative experience for WSU faculty and students while addressing the desire for students to work together," said Steve Allen, principal at PCA and lead architect on the project.

"PCA has been instrumental in turning this shared vision into a reality. Libraries are the heart of an institution, and PCA's design allows our students and faculty to navigate in a more thoughtful, social, and efficient manner," said Evan Dobbelle, president of WSU.

WSU's Ely Library was constructed in the 1960s and in 50 years the role and function of libraries has been transformed by the use of computers, digital technology, and progressive learning styles. Once considered to be a sanctuary for solitude and quiet, libraries have now evolved into dynamic, collaborative, and social gathering spots for varied activities.

The 25,000 s/f phase two, scheduled for construction this summer, will include new lighting and furniture, additional study rooms, a larger classroom, updates to the university archives, and safety and infrastructure upgrades.