

MAKING THE CONNECTION

New building unites Word Alive church under one roof.





“Connecting with God, People and Purpose” is the mission of Word Alive ministry group, based in Oxford, AL. At its main Coldwater campus, the church had grown throughout the years into three buildings covering about 44,000 square feet of space. While there was a good amount of space for its activities, churchgoers had to walk outside between buildings to move from Bible study to church services and other activities. Church leaders wanted to unite the facility.

Bringing everything under one roof and providing additional space for fellowship before and after activities was a key goal, said Jo Lynn Yoder, project architect with R. Messner Construction, which provided turnkey design and build services for the church's expansion. Additionally, she said, it was important to unify the look of the three existing buildings so everything would blend into one cohesive design.

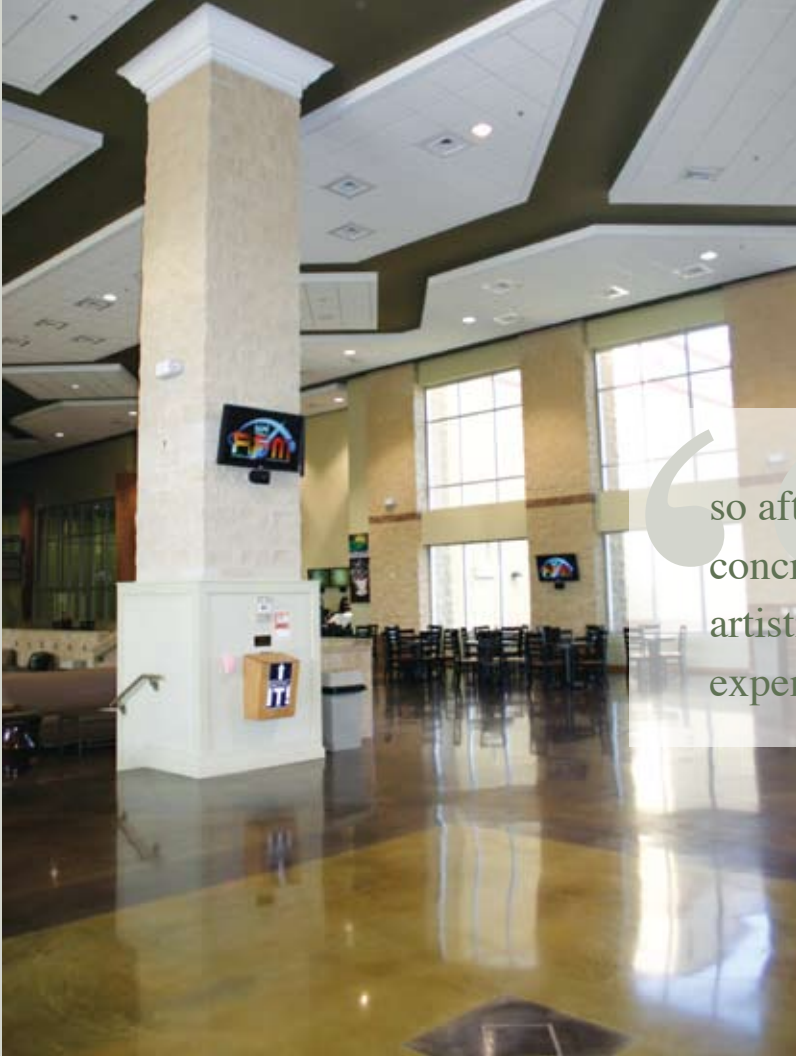
Plans included the construction of a new 52,000-square-foot building, which includes a large open common area/foyer, a gymnasium and additional classrooms. The new building – actually

called The Connection by the church – is located in the center of the three older buildings and is attached to them to create one facility. Project challenges included tying together several different floor elevations, remodeling the exteriors of the existing buildings for a consistent appearance, and making the entire facility accessible to everyone. Work on the new and renovated facilities was completed in early 2010.

Concrete was a key player in both the new construction and the renovation, with materials including colored architectural split-face block, concrete masonry, standard gray block, ready-mix concrete and decorative stained concrete floors. Large quantities of colored split face architectural units were used to create the low-maintenance exterior that tied the design together. “It was many thousands of blocks,” said Jay Howard of Webb Concrete & Building Materials.

“Concrete was chosen based on durability and longevity, with the lowest possible amount of maintenance on the interior and exterior,” said Beverly Mattox, co-Pastor of the church with her husband, Kent. The church was founded in December 2000, and its first building could hold about 500 people. Growing quickly, the church soon added a new sanctuary in 2002 and a children's ministry building





called Kidz Alive in 2004, and modified the facilities several times throughout the years to accommodate new programs, services and members.

“At the end of our first eight years, we had three very functional but unconnected spaces,” said Mattox. “We built the church with one word from God telling us to build it and they would come. It was very ‘Field of Dreams,’” she said.

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“Connecting existing exteriors can be somewhat of a challenge,” said Mattox. “But because we had predetermined the façade that we wanted to create, the rest of the architectural design fell into place with relative ease. A welcoming, warm exterior with a contemporary, modern sense was our goal. We kept the lines crisp and clean and added the tri-colors for additional warmth. The contrast of the large, smooth river rocks in our landscaping design seems to bring the perfect balance between the clean lines of the building and the smooth surface of the surrounding rock.”

“We did a major remodel of the exteriors of all three existing buildings so they all now look like one unit,” Yoder explained. “There’s an exterior wainscot along the new building that extends around the entire facility that really ties the look together. And, now everything is enclosed and church members can easily move between the facilities and activities.”

A spectacular feature of the new building’s interior is a stained and stamped decorative concrete floor throughout the entire mall area. A stain was applied to the concrete after it was poured, featuring several colors, and it also was stamped and etched. A diamond pattern runs throughout the foyer, beginning at the stained concrete floor and echoing in the molding surrounding the light features and insets on upper wall panels that bring the design to completion.

“Utilizing the vast amount of concrete was a given,” Mattox said. “Purely from a practical perspective there was just too much of it to not do something creative with it. Marble, granite or even tile would have pushed the budget over the top so after researching the options, stained concrete gave us the diversity to incorporate the artistic creativity we sought while keeping the expenditure for that statement element in check.”



“It has a unique look and it is absolutely stunning to see the finishes in that foyer,” Yoder says. “Not only is it beautiful and interesting, it’s easy to upkeep; maintenance is low and yet it really looks nice. It’s truly the best of both worlds. “

Mr. Howard agrees, saying, “Much of the interior concrete was stained, creating very attractive and low-maintenance flooring. It’s really hard to describe how great it looks without seeing it in person!”

Mattox said people are constantly asking about the floor. “The concrete floors are one of the most unusual features in our new construction,” she says. “We receive many questions and comments about the process and what is the upkeep and maintenance for

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the floor in such a large space. Many developers, interior designers and home owners have asked about the process and have utilized concrete in projects they had not considered prior to viewing how beautifully it enhanced our interior.”

Today more than 4,000 people call Word Alive International Outreach their church home. The church holds regular worship services and Bible studies at its main Coldwater campus and also at a satellite location in Gadsden, Ala. Additionally, it operates many outreach programs, including addiction recovery, worship and arts, Messianic Jewish ministry, a school and foreign ministries in Argentina, Peru, India and Tanzania.

The Kidz Alive building houses Word Alive Academy, where there are 150 students ranging in ages from newborns to sixth-grade level receiving academic and spiritual education during the week. As many as 500 children attend Sunday school at the facility. The former sanctuary now serves as a multi-purpose facility for a variety of programs and classes, with youth programs held in the adjacent space dubbed The Warehouse. The new building, The Connection, houses a gymnasium, indoor playground, café and bookstore.



Church leaders and members couldn’t be happier with their new, expanded and united facility.

“Children can enjoy a myriad of activities while Mom and Dad stop in for a latte and a pleasant lunch. For multi-taskers, childcare, lunch and shopping can be combined in one stop. The Connection has quickly become a very sought-after venue for weddings, rehearsal dinners, birthdays, anniversaries and other celebratory events,”

Mattox says. ■ Wendi Lewis

