

A fellowship hall

'on steroids'

draws people from far afield

Green Acres Baptist Church of Tyler, TX, completed five years of construction with a Freedom Celebration and new conference center.

BY KEN WARREN



When Green Acres Baptist Church of Tyler, TX, celebrated the 2010 July 4th holiday, the church was celebrating more than our national Independence Day; it was celebrating the conclusion of five continuous years of construction.

The \$40 million process began with the addition of a Missions Outreach Center away from the church's main campus. Main campus additions then followed with the expansion of ground level parking, the creation of a 10,000-square-foot maintenance facility, a 100,000-square-foot educational/administrative building known as The Lighthouse, and, finally, the completion of the CrossWalk Conference Center, an 86,000-square-foot multipurpose facility with adjacent two-level parking deck.

The conclusion of the process brings the combined building square footage on the Green Acres 32-acre main campus to about 539,000. However, the completion of the CrossWalk Conference Center brings with it a whole new way to do ministry.

Bigger and better

If you've been around Southern Baptist circles very long, you may be familiar with the term fellowship hall, which is typically a facility designed for informal gatherings, meetings and meals. Our new CrossWalk Conference Center fills all of those roles; however, it

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Entrance to the CrossWalk Conference Center.

and is divisible into three smaller sections for events of 350, 700 and 1,000 participants respectively. The lower garden level offers additional rooms for groups ranging in size from 25 to 150.

The 2010 July 4th Freedom Celebration demonstrated the flexibility and capabilities of the Conference Center when combined with the other resources both on campus and in the community. Over the four-day holiday weekend, the facilities hosted a Women's Banquet, Family Fun Day and Car Show, Football Skills Clinic, Men's Banquet, four presentations of the church's annual "I Love America" musical celebration, an additional Sunday evening concert, and a reception honoring Viet Nam era veterans.

With the variety of opportunities and the flexibility of the church's new facilities, an estimated total of 17,000 people were involved in the weekend of Freedom Celebration.

Change in services

Since the Freedom Celebration, the CrossWalk Conference Center has become the home to two Sunday morning CrossWalk worship services which occur simultaneously with two Celebration Worship services in the worship center. The music and flow of worship is distinct to the two types of services, but the message is the same. Pastor Dykes' sermons in the Worship Center are broadcast live to the >>



Scene from the church's annual "I Love America" musical celebration.

does so on such a scale that it is affectionately referred to by Green Acres Pastor David Dykes as "a fellowship hall on steroids."

The 85,785-square-foot facility centers around a 23,000-square-foot main room, CrossWalk Central, with the capacity for theater-style seating for 2,100, and seated dining for 1,400. A commercial kitchen and food service ministry is an integral part of the facility. A full stage with high definition video and digital audio systems provides the resources for live or recorded programming of just about any type.

The main room is equipped with motorized moving partitions



BUILDING AGAINST CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

After an exhaustive selection process involving potential architects and builders from across the Southwest, and in spite of conventional wisdom that often dictates to the contrary, both the selected architect and builder are not only located in Tyler, but are members of Green Acres church.

A member of the church's building committee observed, "It didn't take long to see that Fitzpatrick and Denson were simply the best companies for the job." When asked about that fact, and the popular adage that cautions professionals from working for their home church, architect Steve Fitzpatrick observed, "It's common for architects to say, 'Don't ever work for your own church,' but I have never felt that way at all. It's my responsibility to do a great job and make it the best it can be."

Both the church's trust and the architect's and builder's determination proved to be justified as Pastor Dykes summarized, "In my nearly 40 years of ministry, I have never been involved in such a positive, God-honoring building process as this, and the resulting facilities and their impact on our ministry and on our community are testimony to the wisdom of the choices that were made." —KW

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'on steroids'

Conference Center where he appears "bigger than life" through the high definition video system.

Since the inception of the new Sunday morning schedule, the church's average worship attendance has increased by nearly 1,000, and Sunday morning bible study, the church's Sunday morning small groups ministry, has seen its highest attendance in the 55-year history of the church. With the addition of the Conference Center and its video capabilities, the effective combined worship capacity is now



Average worship attendance increased by 1,000 and small groups ministry has seen its highest attendance in 55 years.



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sufficient to meet the needs of Green Acres well into the foreseeable future.

In addition, nonprofit groups from all over the East Texas community are discovering the unique resource that the Conference Center brings to the area, and are working with the church to incorporate the facilities into their plans for the coming year.

Leaning on Isaiah



The concept of the new facilities, and the theme for the capital fund raising emphasis, was based on the passage from the book of Isaiah, "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes, for you will spread out to the right and to the left ... I will make you the joy of all generations."

As Pastor Dykes was communicating the vision through that text, the design of the project was >>

'on steroids'

being orchestrated by Fitzpatrick Architects, and implemented by the builder, Denson Construction, both of Tyler. The resulting footprint of the facilities, with the Lighthouse joining the east side of the 10-year-old worship center, and the CrossWalk Conference Center joining on the west, became a literal representation of the challenge of the scripture selection to "spread out to the right and to the left," and combined the adjacent buildings into a seamless complex of "mobility friendly" facilities. CE

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KEEPING IT ALL WORKING TOGETHER

During an average week, there are typically 200 or more scheduled activities on the Green Acres Baptist Church main campus, in addition to the weekly Sunday morning worship and small groups opportunities. It takes a dedicated person, and a fairly bullet-proof system, to keep all of those activities and the associated facilities functioning smoothly.

For Green Acres, that person is Scheduling Coordinator Debbie Fisher, and that system is the EventU online scheduling system offered by My.ServiceU.com.

In addition to the ongoing event and facilities requests from the



Concession area serves parishioners.

church's 20 primary ministry areas, each year Fisher also coordinates approximately 200 requests from non-profit and community groups to whom Green Acres makes their facilities available on a cost-recovery fee basis.

The fees are determined by the size of the facility involved and includes basic furnishings. Supple-

mentary services, such as food service and audio-visual support, are available at an additional cost.

Over the past year, the church has also orchestrated a number of special one-time events, including a "Hope for 100" Orphan Care emphasis featuring actor Jim Caviezel; a multi-day July 4th Freedom Celebration, with appearances by comedian Chonda Pierce, football players Colt McCoy and Luke McCown, and American Idol singer, Mandisa; the Green Acres Men's Breakfast of Champions, featuring Judge Ken Starr, president of Baylor University; and a four-day Missions Conference in November featuring 24 missionary families and speakers from around the world.



Conference center main room that seats 2,100 people.

The planning and logistics for each of these events are in the hands of the sponsoring ministries of the church, and the support for the events is provided by the Green Acres Facilities, Food Service and Broadcast Ministries. The critical link in bringing all of these events and services together is the scheduling coordinator. —KW

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