

Bricks and Mortar and More—

SAC (South Academic Center)

By Wayne G. Marty

SAC, for most of the Midwest, is a familiar acronym for the Strategic Air Command near Omaha, NE, but during the latter years on the active Westmar campus it was the reference phrase for the South Academic Center. Teaching and housing space was a major concern when the decision was made in March 1990 to proceed with the cooperative Westmar-Teikyo education effort. 400 or more Japanese students were expected to swell the enrollment. The 1920 Dubs Memorial classroom building was considered for major renovation but various factors finally led to the choice of a new building and funding was available from the input of cash associated with the Teikyo connection.

The one story SAC building was constructed rapidly on some of the potential baseball space south of 12th street, using prefabricated exterior concrete walls and mostly modular interior walls with the expectation that in future years it could be modified and used as a major facility for the Maintenance department. Japanese students began arriving in April 1990. After a few weeks of orientation to Le Mars as their new location, regular semester classes had ended and various rooms on campus became available for a summer of intensive ESL (English as a Second Language) training. By September of 1990, when the regular students and more Japanese students arrived, the SAC building was ready for use.

The floor space of SAC was greater than the area of a football field with classrooms and faculty offices on both sides of an H shaped hallway.



The ESL department was on the North side of the H and the English and Social Science departments were on the South side and Cross Bar of the H shaped corridor. Many students took advantage of the help offered by the Writing Lab located in the Cross Bar corridor. Donna Galati, W'89, joined the English faculty in 1991 and considered it an honor to now become a colleague of those faculty members who she had so appreciated and respected while she was a Westmar student just two years previously. Office and classroom space was also found to start a

new Court Reporting training program but the number of students enrolled never became very significant. As the use of the Dubs building decreased during the tough financial times

and shrinking enrollment of the 80's, many of the Social Science Offices moved into the lower east wing of the Bonebrake residence hall. With the move of some faculty to SAC the Bonebrake wing became available again for the needed student housing.

Some of the SAC faculty members felt isolated because the building was physically separated from the rest of the campus by the heavily traveled 12th St., and they welcomed the lunch hour each day when they could join the group of main campus faculty that ate together in the Commons. However many SAC faculty also felt a unique sense of camaraderie within this new space because of the closeness of the various offices. Coffee was always available and Dr. Yergler usually made popcorn each morning and shared it with others all day. After school or when there was no elementary school, Dr. Yergler would often have his young son in the SAC building with him. The basketball hoop on his office door provided active entertainment for the father-son team but also for others who joined in the fun time. The closeness of the SAC faculty was very apparent in September of 1996 when Dr. Steve Rhinehart died following emergency hospitalization. Close friend, Dr. Yergler, was responsible for the clearing of Dr. Rhinehart's office.

The SAC teaching location also had unique challenges. The new ground level, hastily constructed building, was often cold in the mornings. The ground level construction probably contributed to the entry of many crickets and also to the considerable deposits of snow and mud on the hallway carpets particularly in the first years before the parking lot was paved. Smoking was commonplace among the large number of Japanese students who brought much of their culture with them. A smoking area was constructed just outside the back door but second hand smoke still entered the building. ESL teacher, Ann Withrow recalls that the ESL classes were large and the students from Japan came with less English preparation than the Westmar faculty had anticipated, so the entry level classes were very challenging.

The last Westmar University classes were held in SAC in November 1997 when the university closed. However, following the closure, long-time rival, Buena Vista University from Storm Lake, IA, rented space in SAC from the City of Le Mars who now owned all of the Westmar campus and property, and under the leadership of Kaylyn (Busch) Pick W'88, established an extension location in Le Mars with the office and classrooms in SAC. BV purchased Westmar desks and other furnishings from the City of Le Mars. SAC thus became the only Westmar building that continued uninterrupted as an educational building. In 2002 the City sold the building to the Rejoice Community Church that had been renting the Library for their worship location for several years.



The church did not need all of the large building, so continued to rent space to BV until July of 2008 when BV found a more suitable location



Now the Rejoice Community Church has expanded with outreach functions so that they use the entire space – Worship, Food Pantry, A monthly Shepherd's table to feed the needy, counseling services for finances and addictions, youth programs, etc. So, although the latter years at Westmar were shaky in many ways, the SAC building was a major teaching location and it is comforting to realize that some of the remaining Westmar Campus continues to carry on the service emphasis that was a central theme of the Westmar mission for over a century.

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