Webster University, St. Louis
Project Spotlight: January 2012

LOCATION: St. Louis, MO
ARCHITECT: Mackey Mitchell
St. Louis, MO
INSTALLER: John Smith Masonry
St. Louis, MO
GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Alberici Constructors
St. Louis, MO
PROJECT MANAGER: Craig Miller
Webster University
LATICRETE DISTRIBUTOR: Trends in Tile
Bridgeton, MO
Whereas Webster University is a non-profit, private institution of higher education centrally located in St. Louis, it has a presence not just across the United States, but worldwide, as well. With enrolled students representing all 50 states and over 130 nationalities, this highly-ranked Midwest university has a strong, ongoing commitment to continue attracting a diverse and unique student body. Aside from its stellar academic reputation, another main attraction to prospective students is the campus itself. Clearly, a venerated school such as Webster will have a more difficult time attracting applicants if the campus is out-of-date and unattractive looking. College is a collective experience; the physical setting adds to that tremendously. So, in addition to attracting new students, a university must also be mindful of its alumni, and the importance of their continued support of the institution. For these reasons and more, starting in the summer of 2012, Webster University decided to build two new outdoor plazas, serving a dual purpose as scenarios for new and current students to enjoy… and, for honoring the contributions of important alumni, both locally and globally.

Designed by the architectural firm Mackey Mitchell of St. Louis, a firm nationally known for its work with student housing and university buildings, this plaza project was unique in its two goals: One, was to offer attractive, functional space; the other was to serve as a “thank you” memorial. The Garden Avenue Plaza theme was based upon a premise set forth by the university to recognize not only local donors, but global donors, as well. (Webster University has campuses around the world and therefore, donors across the globe).

The idea of creating an outdoors donor plaza in the new quad began to gain some validity. MMA determined that the location between the East Academic Building and the Community Music School would be ideal. “The benefit of this location is that it’s the main thoroughfare between the university’s main parking garage and the Loretto Hilton Theatre (The repertory theatre of St. Louis),” stated Eric Neuner, Senior Associate at Mackey Mitchell. “A great number of patrons will walk through this plaza coming and going to events at the theatre.”

Initially, the area recognized over 250 donors, all of whom made generous contributions in varying amounts. A decision was made to install a “world pattern design” for the plaza signifying Webster’s global influence…and, global donors. In addition, cut from stone and installed right within the plaza walkway, plans called for a graphic of the world-recognized Gateway Arch, signifying Webster University’s presence in St. Louis.

The second of the two constructions was The Compass Plaza. This was primarily designed and designated for the President of the University to speak/hold court at campus functions. Located in what will be a new quad space between Webster University’s Priest House and Pearson House (both of which are on the Historic Registry), funding for this plaza was contributed by just one single donor.

“These plazas are not very big, but are extremely complex,” said Brian Crawford, Construction manager at Alberici Constructors, the General Contractor for the project. “These complexities led to some interesting challenges.” One major challenge was to determine the best way to have a globe design created out of 2” thick granite, the agreed-upon natural stone best suited for carving and being crafted in the best possible way to drain the plaza. Draining the plazas was a major
concern, because both are located in high traffic areas and therefore absolutely cannot afford any flooding. Thus, both plazas were specified with the LATICRETE® Plaza and Deck System, which provides a weather and frost-resistant exterior installation system for ceramic tile, pavers, brick or stone. In particular, the system includes an integral subsurface drainage component which provides for elimination of infiltrated water. It also eliminates dead load problems and high haulage/placement costs associated with conventional gravel drain beds.

“On The Garden plaza, we drained both the surface and sub-drainage to the four corners of the globe. This allowed for the globe in appearance to look uniform and level with a crown in its center,” stated Neuner. “The globe’s granite pavers are set on a 5” concrete slab, 2-1/2” LATICRETE Plaza and Deck System with drainage mat then the 2” thick granite. Drainage has been very efficient with this system, and we know it will prolong the life of both plazas.”

The complete LATICRETE Plaza and Deck System consists of the LATICRETE Tile Drain Mat, a lightweight drainage mat offering 300% better flow rate than crushed gravel drain beds; LATICRETE Latex Mortar Bed, a high-strength, frost and shock-resistant thick bed mortar that provides an extra heavy duty, load-bearing base for the bonded granite finish; HYDRO BAN®, a thin, liquid-applied, waterproofing membrane applied over the mortar bed which provides secondary waterproofing and crack suppression protection; Ceramic tile, pavers, brick or natural stone are installed directly over both the mortar bed and waterproofing membrane with LATICRETE Latex Thin-Set Mortar And Latex Modified Grout, for permanent, weather-resistant installations.

“The architect and general contractor inquired about both the installer’s (John Smith Masonry) and our experience working with similar projects in the past, and to help recommend the best possible installation method for these plazas,” stated Joel Tully of Trends In Tile, the firm which supplied and delivered all LATICRETE products to the site. “Incorporating the LATICRETE Plaza and Deck System was agreed upon by everyone. Our company has been the St. Louis distributor for LATICRETE products for over 25 years. Immodestly, I know as much about LATICRETE products as most LATICRETE sales reps do! That being said, I was in a position to recommend what I knew would be the perfect products for the job.”

LATICRETE PERMACOLOR™ Grout was also a major product used in the creation of the plazas. Anytime there is an outdoor project, the grout must be durable enough to withstand extreme changing weather conditions, incredibly heavy foot traffic and the typical wear-and-tear inevitable on any outdoor construction element.

“This project has been a combined effort of so many people,” said Crawford. “From the designers and installers, to officials at the university, and of course, professional suppliers such as LATICRETE, it felt like everyone working on the plazas was on the same page. In particular, it is a good feeling to know we all were able to contribute towards something that is clearly going to last and become an attraction at the university for decades to come.”

“We wanted to achieve a plaza and an overall area that would be of use to current students, as well as recognize all those who have supported this school,” added Craig Miller, Project Manager at Webster University. “We are very pleased with the design, and think our goals were met, thanks to all the contributions from everyone involved.”