

Merryman Barnes Architects and Czopek | Design Studio: PSU Center for Student Health and Counseling

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(Merryman Barnes Architects)

A visit to the **Portland State University** health center was eye-opening for Keith Whiting, a project architect with Portland-based **Merryman Barnes Architects Inc.** He noticed that the upper floor left students feeling so disoriented that they couldn't find the dental clinic.

"We've had kids holding their mouths asking, 'Do you know where the dentist is?' " he said. "It's that bad."

Merryman Barnes teamed up with interior design firm **Czopek | Design Studio Inc.** on a 12,500-square-foot remodel of the third floor of the **Center for Student Health and Counseling** in

PSU's four-story **University Center Building** in downtown Portland.

Contractor bids are due next month for the estimated \$1.7 million project, Merryman Barnes partner Nancy Merryman said. Construction is scheduled to begin in mid-October, she said.

The project will add exam room and dental clinic space so that the health center can serve more students, said Linda Czopek, a principal with Czopek | Design.

"Student volume is expanding, so the existing center has had a whole lot of activity," she said.

Merryman Barnes and Czopek | Design created a central waiting area to serve the dental clinic, the health center administration and a new health promotions program. The room greets students when they enter the third floor, making the location of the dentist and other health services obvious, Merryman said.

"Our biggest challenge was as soon as they come up to the elevator they know where they're going, creating a center and some personality for this space," she said.

The remodel also improves the health center's testing services wing and moves all the administrative offices together, Merryman said.

"Right now, they're all spread throughout the clinic floor," she said.

More office space will be carved out of a parking garage on the same floor, Whiting said.

"Half of (the floor) is parking garage and half of it is office," he said. "Some of this is claiming the parking garage ... as office."

For the health promotions program space, Merryman Barnes designed a "mind spa" with rounded seats carved into the walls with lights that mimic natural daylight to treat students suffering from seasonal

depression, Merryman said. The room was designed to be soft and comfortable; it has felt walls, Whiting said.

One project focus, Merryman said, was achieving continuity between the building's second and third floors. The second - the health center's main floor - has a nature theme with lots of green and leaf patterns, she said.

Wood-slatted ceilings and walls will more subtly convey a similar feeling, Czopek said. The remodel will also add doorways and dividers with tree patterns carved into them, she said.

"They had a really organic theme, so we tried to reflect that," Czopek said. "It's a message that this is still part of the same building."

A wood-slatted ceiling in the hallway will also help students find their way, Merryman said.

"It leads one down the lobby into the waiting area and into the administrative offices," she said.

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