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## In Maine, Rec Center Bound to Landscape

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ORONO, Maine - For University of Maine students not interested in cross-country skiing or snowshoeing through the woods, staying in shape through the long winter season has historically been a problem.

The sole on-campus gym has been in the athletic center - usually being monopolized by a sports team - and the only reason students ran outside was to get indoors before their extremities froze.

But this year, the doors have opened to a \$25 million recreation and fitness center, and according to rec director Jeff Hunt, many of the university's 11,000 students have come running.

"Usage is through the roof," Hunt said. "We're averaging around 2,200 visits a day. We wouldn't get that much in a whole week [at the athletic center] last year."

The 87,000-square-foot facility includes basketball, racquetball and multipurpose sports courts, an indoor track, a 14,000-square foot fitness center lined with \$500,000 worth of new equipment, and a natatorium with a swimming pool, hot tub and spa.

"The fitness area is heavily used, there's usually always a hoops game going on, and from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m. we average about 30 people in the pool and hot tub at all times," Hunt said. "There are more people being active and working out than there were before by far."

When Hunt and his colleagues consulted with students and architects from Cannon Design in the early stages of the project, he said that one of their priorities was to create a facility that stayed true to the rustic character of Maine.

"We wanted it to have an open and airy feel to highlight being in Maine," he said.

A number of design elements helped accomplish the effect, said Cannon project principal Peter Hourihan.

The facility is located near a wooded area by the edge of campus, "bonding the campus to nature," he said.

On the inside, wood-beam ceilings give the center a "Nordic feel," while numerous large windows create an outdoorsy atmosphere and maximize natural light.

"From almost every area in the building, you have a view of the woods," said Hourihan. "Whether you're looking east, south, north or west, you can see trees. The inside and outside are always connected."

The structure of the building is mostly made of wood, stone and copper, natural materials that change color in wet weather - another connection to nature, said Hourihan

"It's a contemporary building made out of traditional materials."

It's also made out of recycled materials, he added, putting it on-track to receive a LEED silver certification. Other green features include automatic light dimmers, motion timers on water outlets and specially glossed windows to trap thermal heat.

"We calculated an energy savings of \$50,000 a year, which comes to about \$1 million over 20 years," Hourihan said.

Hunt called the new facility "the showpiece" of the university. He said that campus tours now begin and end in the building, and added that sports teams are even using it for recruiting purposes when "it's not even affiliated with the athletic department."

"It has changed the whole complexion of the school," he said. "The campus seems so much busier now. It's more than just a recreation and fitness center. It's a social center as well, a place where people just want to hang out."