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Article published Sep 9, 2007

A one-of-a-kind complex

The new David Letterman Communication and Media Building offers students and faculty the latest in modern design and recording equipment

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Brett Estes came to Ball State University four years ago wanting to work for the school's student-run radio station.

Problem was, it took him more than a year to find it.

Tucked into the basement of the Ball Communications Building, WCRD (91.3 FM) didn't exactly have a presence on campus. Nor, with its tiny studio, did it have much space.

What a difference, then, millions of dollars, new high-tech equipment and a high-trafficked spot on the second floor of the new David Letterman Communication and Media Building makes.

"Some people around here have compared the change like going from the outhouse to the penthouse," joked Estes, a senior who is now WCRD's programming director. "Call it what you will, but we've gone from broadcasting in space the size of a closet to the highest professional facility around."

Begun in 2005, the newly completed, \$21 million Letterman building and its 75,000 square feet of classroom, studio and faculty office space represent the best and latest advances in modern design, materials and construction, Ball State officials say. The building is named after David Letterman, Ball State's most prominent alumnus and host of CBS's *The Late Show with David Letterman*.

"This new building will enhance the university's efforts in recruiting highly talented students and faculty," said Roger Lavery, dean of the College of Communication, Information and Media (CCIM). "We believe that very few colleges can offer the kind of student- and faculty-centered learning opportunities found in this complex."

Top-notch equipment

The centerpiece of the three-story building is a \$1 million production facility on the second floor that features five surround-sound editing suites and two surround-sound recording studios for digital cinema and video sound. The equipment inside rivals that found in the top production houses and film studios in Hollywood, New York and London.

At least 10 telecommunications classes will make use of the studios, said Stan Sollars, a telecommunications professor who assisted in their development.

On the first floor of the building are the offices and studios of Indiana Public Radio. Across the hall, a 110-seat lecture hall and 30-seat screening room will give students majoring in communications access to some of the best digital equipment in the country.

"This will be the first time CCIM will have a state-of-the-art screening room to showcase some of the outstanding work of our students," Lavery said. "Over the years, we have won several major awards, including two Student Academy Awards. Now we won't have to go to Hollywood to preview our best digital films."

The third floor of the building is home to the university's Department of Communication Studies. Students who major in the field find careers as sales representatives, corporate communication specialists, organizational consultants and more, Lavery said.

More space needed

A palpable wave of excitement is felt talking to faculty members and students meandering the sun-lit halls of the open, airy building. "Just walking around, you find yourself rejuvenated and grateful to be here," Sollars said. "It's inspirational, really."

Telecommunications professor Dom Caristi, whose new office in the Letterman building overlooks McKinley Avenue, said the best thing about the facility is the increased amount of space it provides. "As a department, we were getting fairly cramped in BC (Ball Communication Building)," he said.

Ball State's telecommunications department moved to BC shortly after the building, named after Muncie industrialist Ed Ball, was completed in 1988. Since then, the department has grown from about 400 majors to more than 1,100 majors today.

Impressively, the College of Communication, Information and Media (created in 1996) now occupies a dominant three-building communications complex on campus that connects the Letterman building to BC and the Art and Journalism Building to the south. The Letterman building also connects to the Robert Bell building to the north, which primarily houses classrooms and office space for the English department.

Ball State senior Joe Lacay, general manager for WCRD, said he's still amazed to know he will finish his college career working at a radio station that now is one of the best equipped in the country. Student interest in working at the station already is on the rise, he noted, with more than 100 students turning out for an open house at the new studio last month.

"We're no longer a hole-in-the-wall kind of production," Lacay said. "Now we can bring people in here and feel proud."
