



WAKE FOREST
UNIVERSITY

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Polishing a campus jewel

New amenities have quickly become popular with students, faculty and staff

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Chris Ford ('15) quickly found the newly installed piano on Hearn Plaza, just moments after it was wheeled into place. The instrument is a Yamaha electronic keyboard with a solar-powered amplifier, built to look like an upright piano.

Wake Forest's public spaces, particularly Hearn Plaza, are known for beautiful grounds and views of the University's majestic, Georgian buildings. But students and administrators noticed much of the University community was traveling from residence hall to classroom building and back again without pausing to enjoy their surroundings or take a break from their busy, stressful lives.

"Today's college students are well-known for being the most overscheduled and routinized young people in history," Provost Rogan Kersh, who has studied Generation

Y, said. “Encouraging them to embrace well-being in mind, spirit and body can help them balance the demands of Wake Forest’s academics and their extracurriculars.”

The University heard the student, faculty and staff concerns about limited space to just enjoy the gorgeous campus loud and clear. With the goal of relieving student stress and increasing overall well-being in mind, President Nathan Hatch made improving the public spaces on campus a priority.

“Educating the whole person means being aware of wellness and balance in our lives,” said Hatch. “While it may look like just a few tables and chairs, it’s actually a way to encourage more face to face interaction or remind our vibrant campus community to take a few minutes from their busy schedules and recharge.”

But rather than add more seating like other places on campus, it was time for a fresh look.

“We did something unconventional,” Mary Gerady, associate vice president and dean of campus life said. “Instead of looking to other colleges and universities, we looked to cities at home and abroad, to see what we could learn from their vibrant parks, plazas and pubs.”

A place to park it



Wake Forest students Olivia Taldone ('13), Ckalib Nelson ('15), Adam O'Dell ('16), and Miles McKeller-Smith ('16) play Battleship at a table on Hearn Plaza.

To lead this process, the University engaged the nation’s leading park and public space expert Dan Biederman and his firm, [Biederman Redevelopment Ventures](#) (BRV). Biederman is responsible for transforming Manhattan’s Bryant Park,

one of the nation's most dangerous parks in the 1980s, into an international model for public space vibrancy.

Biederman and his team have studied and experimented for more than 25 years to figure out what makes great public spaces work. "We knew that simply copying our successes from elsewhere would not work," George Roberts, the BRV project manager said. "We needed to truly understand the university environment. So we have visited Wake Forest every month to observe the public spaces and interview dozens of students, faculty and staff. They told us they wanted places to gather."

Lightweight, movable tables and chairs began popping up in public spaces around campus late last fall, joined by all-weather ping-pong tables and custom carts stocked with board games and fitness equipment. They just appeared one day, without any fanfare or announcement. But people started using them right away.

This semester brought additional furniture, an outdoor classroom, a custom piano, an al fresco café, and much more not only on Hearn Plaza, but near ZSR Library, Reynolda Patio and eventually the Mag Quad. Additional plans to extend the amenities to Reynolda Village are in the works.

BRV has also been working with campus clubs, professors, and local businesses to build a new schedule of programs and activities, like fitness classes and musical performances, to be added to public spaces around campus.

A pub for Poteat

While students, faculty and staff have already made the tables and chairs great spots for al fresco social networking, more hangout spaces are coming. This summer, the post office will move from its current location in Poteat Residence Hall to Benson University Center. In its place will be an area for gathering, gaming or celebrating. "With both soft seating and tables, we envision this new area to be like a neighborhood pub," Gerardy said. "The kind of place where students can bring their video game consoles for an impromptu tournament or challenge each other to pool, air hockey or foosball. While it will serve pizza and wings, it's not so much a restaurant where ordering is expected, but rather a place to meet your friends that also serves food."

Gerardy says student focus groups have helped her committee create concepts for the yet to be named space. Drawing inspiration from their favorite hangout spots both on-campus and off, the group aims to develop a warm, inviting space that will also have outside gathering spots.

“As the new North Campus residence halls will be opened in August 2013, we envision more north-south traffic through Hearn Plaza,” Gerardy said. “Creating a vibrant city center in what was plainly designed to be the jewel of our campus can only give students new ways to enjoy their time at Wake Forest University.”