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# Good planning, good weather, good teamwork: AVTEC goes up fast to meet needs of students

By DAWNELL SMITH

*The spacious new dorms provide 120 beds and amenities for students at AVTEC. They replace the worn-out dorms built in the 1960s.*

PHOTO: KEVIN G. SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY



Students who live in the new dorms at AVTEC — Alaska's Institute of Technology — now enjoy a spacious common room and two-story glassed recreation area with views of Mount Marathon in Seward. They walk through corridors enriched with color and art, and they move easily from dorm to library, gym and auditorium.

But they probably don't realize that the building they call home took only three days to erect and nine months to complete because of the use of 39 modular units that snapped together like Lego pieces.

"The idea was to build a module building that you could never tell is modular," said Paul Baril of Nvision Architecture Inc., the architect of record contracted with the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. "The challenge was twofold in that we had to resolve complicated details with how the modular components would come together but also the logistics of where the modules would be built and how they would get to the project site and be erected. We worked through all of these challenges by working as a team with everyone involved from the entire design team, general contractor, owner and the module contractor."

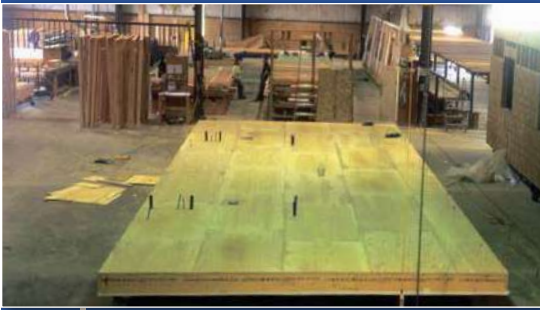
The 35,500-square-foot end result includes 120 beds and various amenities in a three-level building affixed to the

Culinary Arts Building. The project team saved approximately \$6 million to \$8 million in construction costs and about nine months of time by using pre-manufactured module units built by the Stratford Building Corp. of Idaho, Baril said. The foundation and site were prepared while the modules were manufactured. It was Nvision's first experience working with modular design.

"The one thing that I am the most proud of accomplishing on this project is providing a final building that looks and feels like it belongs on the site and was not built in a modular plant, while at the same time also providing the necessary program needs for the building and satisfying the owner/client."

Cornerstone General Contractors Inc.'s project engineer, Brian Ginder, was also pleased with the modular concept and the way the project turned out.

"The module option was a unique approach that shaved months off the construction period but required a ton of coordination with the owner and designers," Ginder said. "AVTEC had a great team in its corner, from the owner representatives to the architect, engineers, and subcontractors. As the general contractor Cornerstone couldn't have asked for a better project team. The results speak for themselves.



The dorms were built as modular units so they could be assembled quickly.



The modules, manufactured in Idaho, await transport to Alaska.



The modules are barged to Alaska to be erected at the AVTEC site.



The foundation and site are prepared in Seward while the modules are being manufactured.



Workers set the modules in place. The project team saved \$6 million to \$8 million in construction costs and about nine months by using pre-manufactured modular units.



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"The entire process of procuring the 39 modules, shipping them via barge down the Snake and Columbia rivers, and then up to Seward directly was

really exciting. Upon arrival, the modules were offloaded and prepped for placement, which took our team just 74.5 hours. In just a few days AVTEC had

a new three-story building on their campus."

The building on Third Avenue replaces the worn-out dorms built in the 1960s. Leaks, a lack of space and poor temperature control made the old dorms inadequate for the influx of students. AVTEC's program provides technical education in subject areas like the applied sciences, culinary arts, maritime studies and allied health.

"Preparing the site was fairly straightforward once we demolished the existing dorm," Ginder said. "We installed the foundation, constructed a three-story building with an elevator to serve as a commons area and tie-in to the existing cafeteria, and then installed all mechanical and electrical systems prior to placing the residential modules."

Cornerstone and Nvision also worked on the first phase of the AVTEC project, the Culinary Arts building, completed in 2010. The second phase of the project, the \$12.7 million dorm building, includes non-shared rooms adjoined to shared bathrooms accessible through lockable doors. AVTEC also has a smaller dorm building next



PHOTO: KEVIN G. SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY

AVTEC's common room and recreation area provide a stunning view of Mount Marathon.



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door and a handful of family residences for housing. Students moved in last January.

The module aspect fit the purpose wonderfully because of the repetitiveness of all the dorm rooms, Baril said. The construction and design team worked closely with the head of the Resident Life Department to gather input from dorm users.

"It looks and feels like it belongs in the site," he said. "They got the type of rooms they wanted, with Jack and Jill bathrooms, and the structure was erected in 72 hours or so. There were a lot of worries about winds and the cranes picking up large boxes and putting them in place."

The modular boxes arrived with finished interiors — the work crew just has to do the roof and siding afterward — so rain and other inclement weather could have made the last days dicey.

"We got lucky in July with a week of awesome weather," Baril said. "It went really smooth. Good luck, good planning, good teamwork."

Ginder agreed. "Working with Nvision was an awesome experience for us. Their team really understands how construction works, and they're all about results. That absolutely suits our style." 

*Dawnell Smith is a freelance writer who lives in Anchorage.*



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