

# Rolling Hills Community Church

BY CAROL BADARACCO PADGETT

## A Study in Connectivity

Tualatin, Oregon, pronounced (two-wah-la-tin), is named for the Tualatin River that flows along this city's Northern boundary. Much like the effortless connectedness of a river, Rolling Hills Community Church shares a united flow in both its design and in the way it ministers to members and to local community.

But like most manmade projects, Rolling Hills had to sculpt the clay a bit to engineer a facility that would help achieve its ministry objectives. As Senior Pastor Dale Ebel relates, "The design [at Rolling Hills] fosters people being able to connect. It fosters relationships."

Yet Ebel admits that getting Rolling Hills' updated facility off the ground was a challenge to begin with. "We negotiated with the county for a seven-year period before getting approval to build," he states. Due to stringent concerns about congestion and growth, the county was slow to let new building take place. But in the end, Ebel and his staff found that even this seeming hindrance turned for God's purpose. The extra time afforded Rolling Hills the opportunity to grow and make design changes that ultimately made for a better facility to suit the ministry.

*One thing leads to another – logically and thoughtfully – in the facility design of this ample house of worship.*

### AT A GLANCE

Rolling Hills Community Church

### DENOMINATION

Non-denominational

### WEEKLY ATTENDANCE

3,200

### STYLE OF SERVICES

Contemporary, variety of musical expressions, movie clips, dramas, sculptures

### KEY EVENTS

Father-Daughter Banquet, Women's Retreats, High School Summer Camp, Junior High Summer Camp, Children's Camp



**PHOTO (RIGHT)** With the look of a performing arts center, the worship center offers attendees a sense of community and connectivity.

**PHOTO (BELOW)** Technology greatly facilitates delivering the message, with quality audio/video components. All of the lighting in the facility operates on a multi-processor lighting control system which is controlled from a remote or hand-held PC.



## Designed to Connect

Rolling Hills Community Church's latest project is a 135,000-square-foot addition, with 80,000 square feet completed in the first phase. Phase I includes a new state-of-the-art sanctuary that turned one year old in August that is all about connection – an element that performing arts assembly space and design consultant Paul Luntsford, president and principal consultant with Aloha, Oregon-based PLA Designs Inc. understands well.

"There is a fundamental principle about a contemporary worship center that is not true about a performing arts center," Luntsford explains. "The principle is 'community.' In church, we all want to be there together. Worship is best supported when we can hear and see each other."

Fan-shaped seating, like that employed in Rolling Hills' auditorium, offers two benefits in the church setting. First, the fan shape means there are fewer rows of seating because each row contains more seats, and second, it delivers "better perception of each other as a group," Luntsford says.

Yet, fan-shaped seating comes with its drawbacks. "Unfortunately, it increases the challenge of managing sightlines . . . . As the seating gets wider, it is much easier to have undesirable 'peek-a-boo' problems into the side-backstage areas. It also makes seeing the whole performance . . . on the side nearest to you nearly impossible," Luntsford says.

Clever architectural design in the worship area at Rolling Hills helped to alleviate many of these issues, and Ankrom Moisan Associated Architects (AMAA) of Portland, Oregon, is credited with achieving great success. The staggered row seating AMAA designed helps worshippers see the stage and still retain a sense of community connectedness in the 2,500-seat auditorium. Vance Breshears, president and principal consultant with El Cajon, California-based Sound Technology Consultants Inc., the project's audio/video consultants, also provided significant design contribution to the seating layout.

Pastor Ebel believes that AMAA's architectural approach and Luntsford's assembly space consulting were key to making Rolling Hills a type of facility that furthers the church's ministry. The vision of both firms was built by Gresham, Oregon-based P&C Construction, general contractor on the project. "Form always follows function. It's a big worship facility. We believe that



truth flows best through meaningful relationships, and the supporting facilities built at Rolling Hills allow this process to happen," he says.

Scott Thayer, principal with AMAA, says that intricacies of detail in architectural design of Rolling Hills' worship center help keep the flow of community happening. For example, Thayer points out that the worship center's main entry brings service goers to the center of the room. The slope of the floor, too, helps with the fan-shaped seating to achieve the community feel.

**"THE DEPTH OF THE ROOM FROM THE STAGE AND THE PITCH OF THE STEPS FROM THE STAGE – ALL THESE ARE FACTORS THAT HELP DECREASE THE PERCEIVED SIZE OF THE ROOM," THAYER EXPLAINS.**

So while Rolling Hills benefits from its huge auditorium to serve its sizable congregation – some 3,200 weekly attendees – the intimacy of community worship and experiencing worship with one's neighbor is not weakened by the enormity of the architectural scale.

Another important key to the accessibility of Rolling Hills is literally wheelchair accessibility, according to Thayer. The slope of the floor to the stage not only helps decrease the perceived size of the room, but it makes the stage accessible to wheelchairs, and this, more than anything, furthers Pastor Ebel's mission with Rolling Hills – that it draw in the community, the unchurched, everyone.

### **Connected Components**

Some of the other components of Rolling Hills are a grand foyer that acts as a hub where all church activities flow from. According to the designers, the foyer acts as a communications space before and after services and offers an atmosphere of invitation through a combination of natural and accent lighting.

Another unique component of the facility's design is its flow throughout. This flow offers an abundance of clear, intuitive ways to get around in the building.

In the large auditorium, there is a giant skylight over the primary cross aisle that radiates soft, natural light into the

room, yet doesn't interfere with image displayed on the projection screens. The auditorium also features catwalks so that technicians can access the house lighting fixtures and service them without using ladders or lifts. In addition, the total facility incorporates a multi-processor lighting control system (ETC Unison CMEi and Unison LCD) where all auditorium lighting and public space lighting can be controlled from a remote or hand-held PC.

Ever keeping the connectivity at the level of human interaction, Rolling Hills' facility design offers conversation alcoves in the foyer and side halls for both private counseling and friendly conversation.

Another congregation favorite is an intimate café in the grand foyer. The café features a cast glass mural of the Temple in Jerusalem with three crosses on Golgotha and the surrounding hillsides, including a thin sheet of water cascading down the entire front surface and accent lighting which brings attention to the symbols and representations.

### Negatives to Positives

Rolling Hills' Administrative Pastor Paul Osborn says the church experienced a number of challenges in its building growth, but that God always turned these challenges to opportunities.

For example, when the church decided to build its new sanctuary some seven years ago, it initially went back to the same contractor it used when Rolling Hills added on to its facility in 1991. But like many churches at one time or another, the staff soon learned that the scope of its new sanctuary would call for a shake up in contractors – never an easy thing.

"We realized the contractor was not big enough to handle the [sanctuary] project," he explains. "So we parted on good terms and began interviewing larger contractors." Church staff ultimately chose P&C Construction to handle the project.

Yet, long before construction ever began, the Rolling Hills staff would have to endure waiting imposed by the county – which took some seven years to get necessary approvals.

During this time, Luntsford says the focus of Rolling Hills ministry changed significantly as the church grew. And the wait became well worth it. "My initial goals were to help them help their architectural team design a fairly regular 2,500-seat space in a fairly regular community for a moderately conservative church," he says.

**"BY THE TIME WE WERE DONE, THE CHURCH HAD BECOME A VERY CONTEMPORARY, AGGRESSIVE AND CREATIVE COMMUNITY. THEY HAD DEVELOPED A POWERFUL WORSHIP ARTS DEPARTMENT THAT WEEKLY SUPPORTS HIGHLY PROFESSIONAL-CALIBER WORSHIP SERVICES."**

Osborn, too, is grateful for the positive changes that came of frustrating waiting early on. "In the beginning we had an affinity for lots of natural light in the sanctuary, so the initial design had lots of windows," he recalls. But Rolling Hills' ministry today requires stringent control of light for dramas and productions within the sanctuary, he explains.

"It was a God thing that the city delayed construction. So as we grew and our

needs changed, we substantially redesigned the worship center for control of the lighting for our video and production needs," Osborn says.

From a construction standpoint, the timing of the project went well, according to Mark Koester, project manager with P&C Construction. "We finished in the summer and were closed up before rain began," he says of the large project that required a multitude of contractors.

### Keeping the Connection Strong

Moving forward, Ebel and his staff are working to keep Rolling Hills serving its community by opening up its fantastic new space. "We've stopped our Saturday services now to do dramas, forums, benefit concerts for Katrina. We want to be a benefit to the community. We're open to local high schools for use in graduation ceremonies. It's not about us making money. They're coming because they see we don't have an ulterior motive," he says.

Osborn says Rolling Hills has a staff person who takes calls for the church and books community events in the auditorium, some at the time, and others are decided before a committee.

Maintenance is handled in-house, and Osborn says a facility manager, four full-time and one part-time custodians handle the clean-up tasks. The auditorium floor surface is stained concrete for easy clean up, according to Koester, while other surfaces throughout the new addition include large sandstone tile and carpet, predominantly.

Ebel is quick to point out that Rolling Hills doesn't simply sit back and let the community come asking for use of the

new facility. Rolling Hills looks for areas of interest within the community and invites the community in to experience worship.

He recounts, for example, how the new sanctuary hopes to host a group of local bikers who celebrate war veterans. "We [will invite] these men to ride down the aisle in a special service and [present] them with an American flag." At Rolling Hills, it's all in the name of connecting.

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## QUICK-LINKS

### **Ankrom Moisan Associated Architects**

*Architectural services*

(503) 245-7100

[www.amaa.com](http://www.amaa.com)

### **P&C Construction**

*General contractor*

(503) 665-0165

[www.healthystand.com](http://www.healthystand.com)

### **PLA Designs Inc.**

*Assembly space and illumination consultants*

(503) 642-2168

[www.pladesigns.com](http://www.pladesigns.com)

### **Sound Technology Consultants Inc.**

*Audiovisual consulting*

(619) 596-4800

[www.sound-technology.com](http://www.sound-technology.com)

## RESOURCES

— LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT —

*John F. Lee*

— CARPET —

*Atrium & public space – Monterey*

*Worship center – Durham*

*Back of house – Designmanate*

— PRIMARY CEILING PRODUCT COMPANY —

*Acoustical Tile – Armstrong*

— PRIMARY SEATING PRODUCT COMPANY —

*Series USA*

— LIGHTING FIXTURES —

*Inah, Elliptique, Wiconia, Lithonia, Bruck, Visa, ETC*

— PLUMBING FIXTURES —

*Kohler*

— DOOR HANDLES —

*Schlage*

— PRIMARY DOOR PRODUCT COMPANY —

*Jeld-Win Inc.*

— ROOFING —

*Metal Roofing – AEP; Built-Up Roofing – John Mansill*