



The Valley



The dramatic architecture of the Minnesota State University Student Union has garnered a national design award for Paulsen Architects of Mankato.



John Cross

MSU building design draws national attention

By Tim Krohn
Free Press Staff Writer

MANKATO — Minnesota State University always lacked an entry point — a spot that drew visitors' eyes to say, "This is the gateway to the campus."

The recently completed Centennial Student Union renovation and addition helps provide that sense of welcome, and its architecture has been singled out for a national award.

"The student union is considered the front door of your campus. It was really exciting to be able to create this for MSU," said Bryan Paulsen of Paulsen Architects in Mankato.

The firm was awarded the

national Facility Design Award of Excellence from the Association of College Unions International. A consultant used by Paulsen, MHTN Architects of Salt Lake City, shared in the award, which was given recently during a ceremony in Kansas City, Kan.

The \$11 million project on the 33-year-old union began in early 2004 and was completed in late 2005. More than one-third of the 15,000-square-foot facility was completely renovated during the project. An additional 8,200 square feet was added to the union, including an 80-foot glass curtain wall and a student lounge and hearth room featuring a three-story limestone wall

and 16-foot-wide fireplace.

Paulsen said the large hearth room and glass wall worked well because there was already an outdoor sunken courtyard in place that could be used to give the area depth. "The old courtyard that was there was pretty dingy and no one used it."

The glass wall not only created a dramatic effect, but it lets plenty of natural light into the lower level of the union.

Paulsen said the limestone was an obvious choice for the fireplace area. "Kasota Stone is an icon material in our neck of the woods, and this is a beautiful way to showcase it."

Please see BUILDING, Page B3

BUILDING: A focal point

Continued from Page B1

Paulsen's firm talked with students, faculty and administrators to get input on the building's design and then brought in two specialty firms to consult. The Salt Lake City firm specializes in student union designs and a Massachusetts firm specializes in designing food service areas.

"Designing food service areas is more than just putting in a kitchen. You have to understand the food platforms for national restaurant chains and know how students are going to flow through the spaces and not have any bottlenecks."

MSU President Richard Davenport said the university wanted a dramatic building as a focal point for the campus. "This

building creates the beautiful new gateway and distinguished image we wanted for our university," he said.

Paulsen said the Student Union as well as the new Taylor Center athletic complex are dramatic buildings that help the university attract students.

"When they're going to recruit students, they take them to the union and the Taylor Center. They're creating buildings up there that are attractive tools for drawing students," Paulsen said.

Paulsen Architects is an architectural, planning, engineering and interior design firm. Paulsen has practiced architecture in Mankato since 1982 and employs 20 people at the firm.