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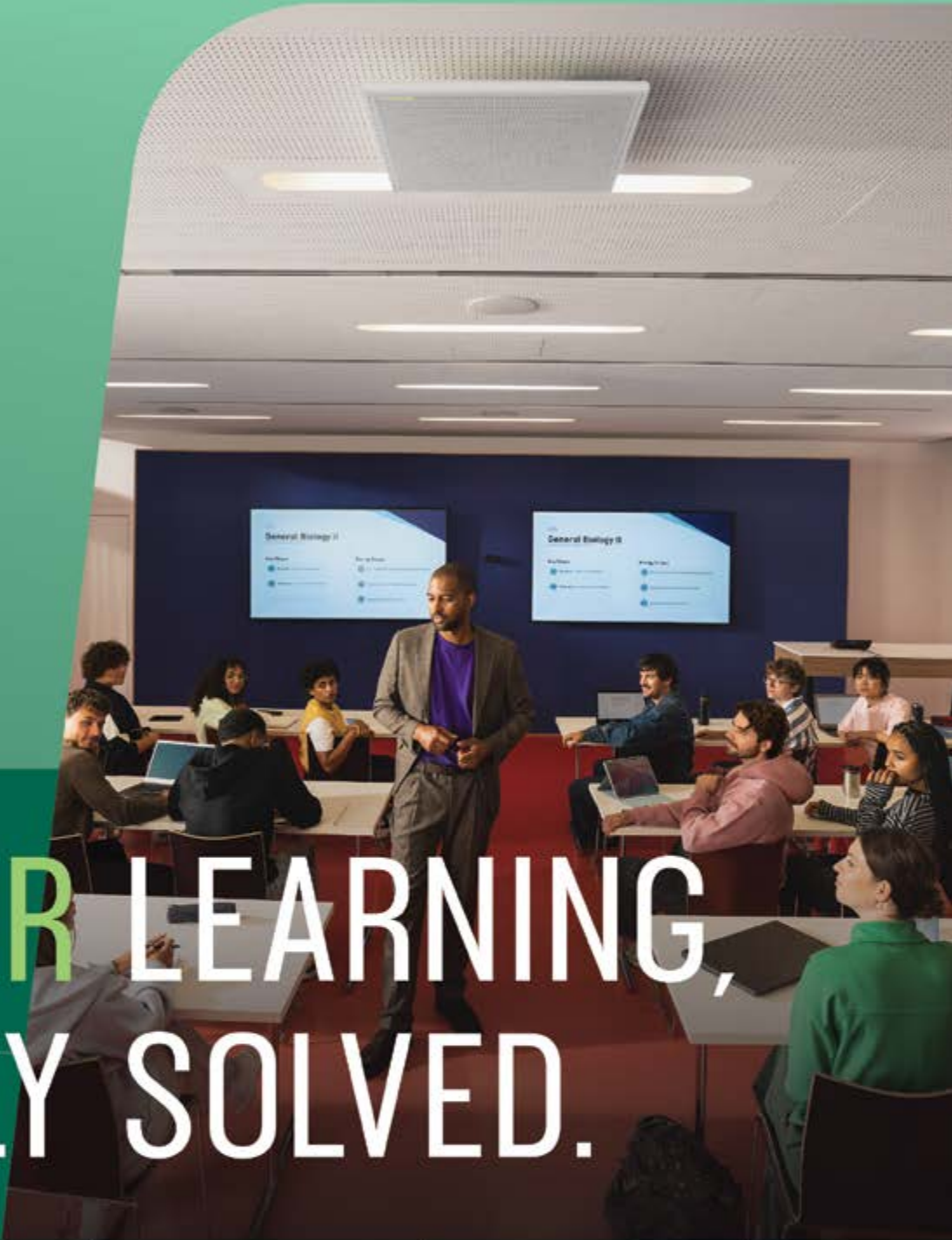


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Editor's Letter

OCTOBER 2026

Fall Has Arrived—and So Has the Busy Season

Changing leaves, cooler temperatures, packed stadiums—fall brings college campuses to life. Homecoming, concerts, alumni gatherings, and a dozen events nobody put on the calendar arrive at once.

And someone has to keep everything looking great and running smoothly. That's you.

This October, *PUPN* explores flooring, building facilities, grounds equipment, and portable staging that helps turn outdoor spaces into gathering places. Our Professor Spotlight also celebrates the people who make campuses special.

Those “effortless” campus moments? We know how much work happens behind the scenes.

Thank you for reading *PUPN* and trusting us as a campus resource. Have a construction project, renovation, grounds improvement, or campus transformation underway? Call or send us a note—we'd love to feature your campus and its hardworking people.

Enjoy fall—and remember, when campus looks perfect, somebody worked hard to make it happen.

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PHOTO COURTESY FOTINA NAUMENKO

Curating a Career in Voice at Shenandoah Conservatory

BY CYNTHIA MWENJA, PhD

Dr. Fotina Naumenko, associate professor of Voice at the Shenandoah Conservatory, is a Fulbright scholar and Grammy nominee who has earned exceptional accolades for her brilliant solo performances. Her performance credits also include elite vocal ensembles such as Skylark and Conspirare. Naumenko values a balance between her performance commitments, teaching responsibilities, and family life; she demonstrates through her own example the creative mix of roles and opportunities that she advises her students to seek.

Byron Jones, professor of Voice at the Shenandoah Conservatory, admires the compelling combination of confidence and ease that Dr. Fotina Naumenko exhibits in working with students, colleagues, and fellow performers. From the first moments the two met, Jones was struck by the insight that Naumenko “had nothing to prove, everything to share.” Now that they have worked together for eight years, his admiration for her has only grown; he appreciates her effortless integrity and professionalism as well as the collaborative partnership the two share in cultivating and mentoring students at the Conservatory.

Performing and “Correlating Careers”

As a professor of Voice, Naumenko is “passionate about staying in the performing sector”; doing so, she says, makes her more equipped as an educator. The Shenandoah Conservatory prides itself on having faculty in the industry, so it supports faculty members who sustain performance work. Naumenko points out that professors need to actively participate in the world of performance not

just to continue honing their skills but also to be abreast of the current realities and opportunities in the field.

For classical singers like Naumenko with performance interests that extend beyond opera, one specific career pipeline does not exist. As a result, building a career in the field can be highly individual and is based in each person’s interests and voice. In years past, the conventional career advice for voice students was to earn BM and MM degrees in Voice, then audition for young artist programs with various opera companies. After securing some of these opportunities, vocalists were told that the definition of success would be to secure an agent and focus on a career in opera performance.

Now, vocalists are able to—and indeed must—follow other career trajectories, such as participating in ensemble work, being concert artists, or performing as soloists with symphony orchestras. Expanding beyond opera, some vocalists may now specialize in new classical works, while others might

concentrate in early music. Realistically, Naumenko explains, the majority of vocalists today combine all of these options, as well as teaching and engaging in related fields like arts administration. Naumenko calls the array of job opportunities that vocalists assemble to earn a living “correlating careers,” noting that maybe one percent of working vocalists earn all of their income from singing.

Figuring out one’s own personal array of correlating careers is part of the discovery process for each performer. Some might broaden into other genres of music, such as R&B or jazz. An important aspect for vocalists to consider is that supplemental jobs must make sense for the individual’s interests as well as allowing for vocal health, since a singer’s voice is their instrument.

Finding a manageable balance of jobs is not always easy, Naumenko states. When she began working at the Shenandoah Conservatory in 2018, she faced a learning curve in finding the right ratio between being out of town for gigs and being on campus

to teach. She recalls that, during her early years on campus, she was gone one or two times each month to perform, whether as a soloist or with one of several professional choral organizations. Naumenko remembers that she could still teach with that level of travel—and she appreciated bringing insights from her performance opportunities to her students—but she needed a better balance between the two. Naumenko’s busy schedule was disrupted by the pandemic, and she now wonders if she would have been able to shift her own direction without it. Up until that point, she had been working as hard as she possibly could, saying “yes” to every opportunity, as many young career vocalists often feel compelled to do.

With all performance venues closed and 11 contracts cancelled in the pandemic, Naumenko took time to reflect on the kind of music she actually wanted to be doing. She decided to start more selectively saying “yes” to give herself agency over her own career direction. As a result, Naumenko conceived an ambitious project grounded in her passion

for chamber music. She engaged four different composers to write pieces for her voice and a chamber ensemble; each composition employed a different array of instruments. The pieces premiered when performance became possible again. In 2024, she produced an album, *Bespoke Songs*, which featured the collective works; it was nominated for a 2025 Grammy in the category of Best Classical Solo Vocal Album.

Projects like these involve a great deal of entrepreneurship for those involved. Naumenko funded the project by writing grants and soliciting donors. She also took care of all details in coordinating rehearsals, organizing the recordings, hiring the recording engineer, overseeing the label design, acting as producer, and promoting the album. Naumenko had no previous experience in doing any of these jobs; she developed the skills when she needed them, as many artists must do in order to create and produce their own work. Naumenko compares the experience of putting this project together to “jumping off a cliff and

trusting that something will catch you.” Her great determination and focus can be seen in the way that she managed every aspect of this project from idea to fruition.

Naumenko has also developed an additional correlating career based in her Russian and Ukrainian heritage. Her dissertation and Fulbright project focused on diction for Russian arias, and she provides those resources at her website, RussianAriaResource.com. She also works as a clinician, coaching professional groups in Russian diction. For example, she is currently working with the Houston Symphony chorus to prepare them for upcoming performances of Russian choral works. Naumenko shares this specialization with her students, as well, giving them the advantage of being able to include Russian pieces in their repertoires.

After the pandemic re-set, Naumenko is now more thoughtful about the performance opportunities she accepts. One important ongoing commitment is being a member of Skylark, “a six-time Grammy-nominated
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professional vocal ensemble known for extraordinary singing and for concerts that push beyond the conventions of traditional choral performance,” according to its website. Matthew Guard, Skylark’s artistic director, says that the professional ensemble’s members are all among the best singers in the nation, and he regards Naumenko as a model colleague with amazing talent. Not only is she a compelling soloist with a sublime voice, he affirms, but she can also meld into the ensemble and show seamless cohesion as part of the group; these skills can be challenging to balance as a vocal artist. Recently, Skylark has been performing *Re-Imaginings*, which features pieces of orchestral music re-set for voice, turning choir members into instruments. In one section, Naumenko produces a D above high C that sounds like a violin—“just her most recent display of virtuosity,” Guard states.

Guard’s and Naumenko’s mutual interests also led to a “fun collaboration,” Guard

reports. Having obtained an autographed, handwritten copy of Sergei Rachmaninoff’s 1915 a cappella choral composition, *All-Night Vigil*, Guard produced a new layout of the work. Naumenko translated the diction using her signature version of the International Phonetic alphabet, and Skylark has been performing the resulting piece since 2022.

Teaching

Of course, Naumenko shares all of her performing and correlating career experience with her students. Jones admires Naumenko as a brilliant pedagogue who is a “powerful role model, particularly for female students—and also her colleagues.” Jones and Naumenko both note that, ideally, the teacher and performer roles should each inform the other; Jones appreciates the exemplary ways that Naumenko “integrates the different parts of her professional identity.” As a stellar soloist, ensemble member, and Russian diction coach, Jones explains, Naumenko shows her students

“what a rich life in music can be.”

Naumenko points out that majoring in a discipline that does not have a clear employment path is an act of courage. Now that college is commonly understood as a pipeline to a particular job, she says, pushback can come from all sides—not only from society and one’s family, but from oneself. By contrast, Naumenko states that this view ignores what students learn in college outside of career-related information. She conceives of college as a time to explore, not just for the sole purpose of a specific career, and she hopes that students will nurture their interests and learn more about the world as they matriculate.

Naumenko is very clear with her students that they each have to make their own path in the industry. She is transparent that doing so can be quite challenging; each person has to put together their own array of answers. Naumenko tells her students that they should

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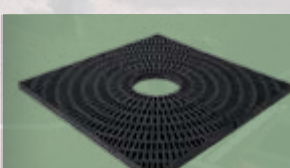
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say “yes” to many different opportunities as they are getting started—because they will need the income, but also because they will begin to figure out what they like by trying a variety of things. She also tells her students that they should later shift at some point to establish a manageable work-life balance. She encourages her students to “follow the instincts of their interests.”

Jane Gowen, owner and voice teacher at the Skylight Voice Studio, was Naumenko’s student as she earned her Master’s degree in Vocal Performance at the Shenandoah Conservatory. Gowen knew from their first lesson together that Naumenko had a knack for quickly understanding what a student needed to progress as a vocalist. Gowen has based her own way of working with students directly on Naumenko’s kind, student-centered approach. From Naumenko, Gowen learned that “life as an artist is worthwhile, even if it is not common.” Gowen recalls that Naumenko did not downplay the fact that there would be challenges and obstacles in

a performance career—but she also focused on the possibilities for creative solutions. Naumenko has helped Gowen look at the big picture; instead of only concentrating on what’s right in front of her, Naumenko advised to look at five and 10 years out, while also thinking about what she herself wanted instead of only pleasing others. From Naumenko, Gowen learned that she can take meaningful risks to follow her dreams while still making sure she takes care of her financial responsibilities and goals.

Family Life

Naumenko has needed to further develop her approach to work-life balance as her family has grown over the past few years. She carefully weighs how much out of town work to accept and confirms that continuing to enjoy professional career growth while seeing to her family’s needs is a “big balancing act.” Jones says that Naumenko is good at establishing such boundaries as an accomplished professional who is also committed to motherhood. Since her family has grown,

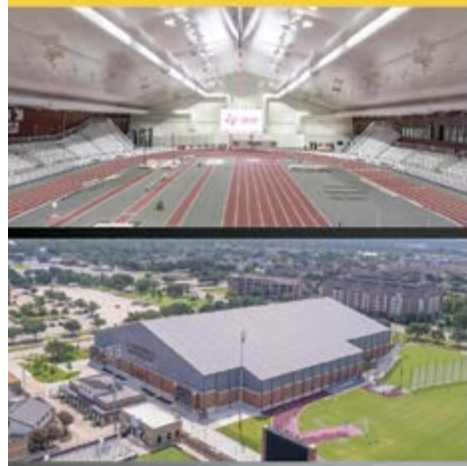
Naumenko has pivoted to taking more local contracts so that she can both perform and be home in the evenings. She has also shifted to engage in more entrepreneurship so that she has more control and decision-making power in the projects she takes on. Many academics feel pressure to minimize their families as they engage their professional obligations, and Naumenko offers a powerful corrective to this impulse in unapologetically recognizing her need to balance all of the pieces that comprise a full life.

Value of Performing Arts

Naumenko is sure that the skills that live performers develop, as well as the challenges they learn to overcome, will become even more valuable in the age of rampant AI. She points out that the humanity of live performance cannot be replicated—the somatic skill, the body awareness, and the shared live experience. As a lauded performer and educator, Naumenko cherishes the value of her craft as it enhances the human experience. In curating her own mix of performance commitments, teaching responsibilities, and family life, Naumenko illustrates exciting possibilities for individuals to flourish in the arts.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dr. Cynthia Mwenja teaches Composition and Rhetoric at the University of Montevallo.



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FACILITIES & MAINTENANCE

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Why the World's Largest College Campus Keeps Buying More Grasshoppers

BY GRASSHOPPER

Known as the largest college campus in the world, Berry College in Mount Berry, Ga., is a nature lover's paradise. Vast forests, wetlands and streams are scattered throughout the 27,000-acre campus. There is also an enormous amount of turfgrass to be managed.

"We keep around 250 acres mowed and maintained," says Mitch Davis, grounds superintendent at Berry College.

Grasshopper mowers have been helping cut quite a few of those acres. In fact, it was a professional landscape company that first sparked Berry College's interest in Grasshopper. That company had been hired to help keep up with all the mowing around campus.

"They ran Grasshoppers and were always bragging on the quality of the mower, the service and support, and the convenience of having a reliable dealer nearby," says Phillip Chastain, shop supervisor at Berry College. "So we invited Grasshopper in for a demo.

We liked the mowers, and we really liked the price. We decided we'd be crazy if we didn't at least try one."

After trying out a FrontMount™ model for a year, Chastain says everyone on the Berry College grounds crew was sold on the Grasshopper brand. Berry College's mower fleet now includes six Grasshopper machines, all purchased over the past few years:

- 900D FrontMount with diesel engine and 72" deck
- 325D MidMount™ with diesel engine and 61" deck
- 329B MidMount with gas engine, 61" deck, and PowerVac™ Collection System
- Two 440B MidMounts with EFI

(electronic fuel injection) gas engines and 61" decks

- SO26 OutStander® Stand-On™ with gas engine and 52" deck

Choosing the right mower for the application

Grande Dinero, a mowing application consultant at Grasshopper, has worked closely with Berry College to help them select the right mowers for the different types of mowing situations their ground crew encounters.

"When they are looking to bring another mower in, I find out where they are going to use it," Dinero says. "I'll even go over to campus to look around. Then we can configure the mower to however the crew is going to use it. We never want to just deliver a mower and hope it does what they need."

FrontMounts are utilized in the hillier areas of campus where the terrain constantly changes. "A longer FrontMount machine really helps in this regard," Dinero says.

The two Model 440Bs are Berry College's go-to mowers when speed and cut quality are of utmost importance. "They use these mowers on the main entrances, athletic fields, and even the president's house," Dinero says.

The 329B MidMount with the PowerVac Collection System is used to maintain the grounds around a popular tourist attraction known as the House o' Dreams. Sitting atop Lavender Mountain, the house is surrounded by trees. Dinero says Berry College has been impressed with how the PowerVac Collection System makes leaf removal so much easier.

Berry College's most recent purchase is the SO26 Stand-On. Crews needed a lighter mower that would be gentler on the fresh sod surrounding a new building that had just opened up. A 52" Stand-On was the perfect solution.

"Our ability to communicate and work

together on the right solutions is what has made our partnership with Berry College so successful," Dinero says.

How Grasshopper mowers help save money

As the person in charge of maintaining Berry College's vehicles and equipment, Chastain was hopeful that the Grasshoppers would be more cost-effective than some of the other mowers in the ground crew's fleet. He hasn't been disappointed.

First of all, Berry College saved money on the upfront purchase because they took advantage of a cooperative purchasing program Grasshopper is a part of. Those types of programs help ensure the best pricing for governmental and non-profit agencies. "Berry College chose the agreement we have with GovMVMTC," Dinero points out.

Grasshopper mowers have also been less

expensive to operate, particularly in the area of fuel cost. The EFI engines on Berry College's two most utilized MidMount mowers have helped reduce fuel consumption.

Common replacement parts are also less expensive than many other mower brands, including one that Berry College had been operating for years.

"A new spindle assembly from Grasshopper is nearly half the price of other brands," Dinero cites as an example. "Our spindles are also easily rebuildable. That enables a technician to take a worn spindle off, install a new one, and take the worn one back to the shop to replace whatever components need replacing. That helps keep the mower up and running while keeping maintenance costs down."

Parts commonality has also helped Berry College save money. For example, the same belt and spindle can be used on a certain deck *continued...*

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size across different Grasshopper models. That allows Chastain to streamline his parts inventory and keep costs down.

How Grasshopper mowers help save time

Grasshopper mowers have the right combination of ground speed, cut quality, and operator comfort. That combination has allowed for maximum productivity, Dinero reports.

Berry College ground crews are also saving time when servicing mowers. “The Grasshoppers have been so much easier to maintain than other brands we’ve used,” Chastain relates.

As an example, Dinero points to the extended 1,000-hour service interval on a mower’s first hydro fluid change, which is nearly four times longer than many other mowers. “Grasshopper’s blades will also

typically last a lot longer than many other mowers,” Dinero adds.

Access to common service items is also made easier by the Grasshopper design, which helps speed up repairs.

“The hood opens easily and the seat flips up easily,” Dinero explains. “Crews really like the PowerFold® deck on their two FrontMount mowers, which automatically raises at the touch of a switch. Sometimes basic repairs like blade or belt changes can be made in the field, which saves a lot of time because the campus is so large and the repair shop might be quite a ways away from where a crew is mowing.”

Having a strong local Grasshopper dealer nearby also helps Berry College save time. Chastain’s repair shop handles all preventive maintenance in-house, as well as most non-warranty repairs. It’s nice to know that parts are always readily available just 10 miles

down the road.

“Berry College has built a great relationship with their dealer,” Dinero says. “Getting parts is no longer a challenge like it was with another brand they were using. Sometimes I play middleman and pick things up and drop them off. We all work together to do whatever we can to keep their mowers running and their costs down.”

That’s precisely why Berry College has continued to add more Grasshoppers to their fleet.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Founded in  Kansas, Grasshopper is a family-owned, innovation-driven manufacturer of American-made zero-turn mowers. Since introducing its first mower in 1969, the company has remained committed to engineering excellence, operator comfort, lasting performance, and dependable dealer support worldwide.



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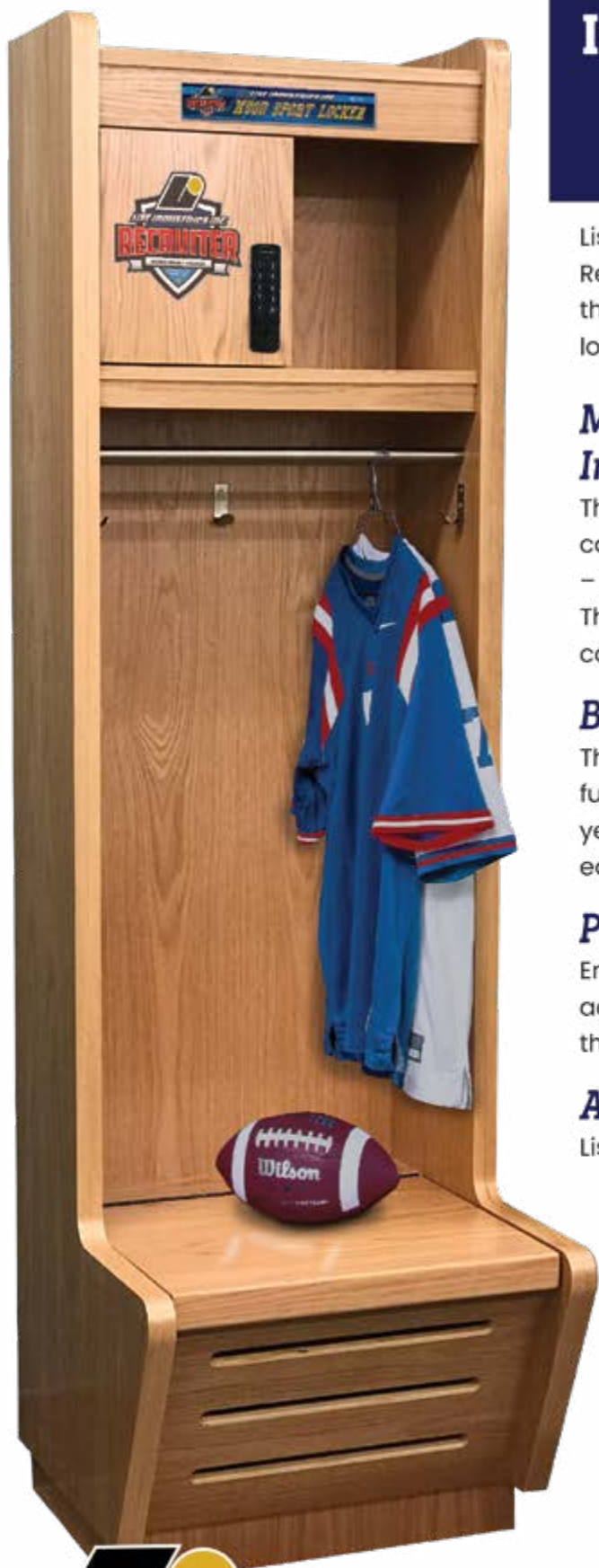
BY IMETCO



PHOTO COURTESY IMETCO

Universities continually look for ways to make campus facilities more versatile, efficient, and valuable to the communities they serve. Athletic centers, recreation facilities, performing arts spaces and other large gathering areas are expected to support a wide range of academic, social, and community activities. Increasingly, institutions are also considering how these everyday facilities can provide protection when severe weather threatens the campus and surrounding area.

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A multi-use facility designed to serve as a community safe room offers an effective response to both needs. During normal operations, the building may host practices, events, meetings, performances or student activities. During a tornado or other extreme wind event, designated areas can provide a protected refuge for students, faculty, staff, and potentially members of the surrounding community.

This dual purpose makes the facility a valuable campus asset, but it also raises the performance expectations for every part of the structure. A building intended to protect occupants during extreme conditions cannot be approached as a conventional construction project with a collection of independently selected components. Its walls, roof, openings, connections and structural elements must function together as a complete protective envelope.

For facility managers, that makes early coordination and assembly-level accountability particularly important.

A Growing Need for Campus Resilience

The threat of severe weather has always influenced building design, but the frequency and financial impact of major weather events have

made resilience a more prominent consideration in institutional planning. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the United States experienced an average of 23 billion-dollar weather and climate disasters annually from 2020 through 2024, compared with an annual average of nine events between 1980 and 2024. Severe storms accounted for more than half of the billion-dollar events recorded during that broader period.

Universities must consider more than the potential cost of physical damage. Severe weather can interrupt instruction, displace students, disrupt essential services and affect an institution's ability to support its surrounding community. Because many campuses function much like small cities, preparedness must address both immediate life safety and the ability to resume operations after an event.

A strategically located community safe room can become an important part of that preparedness plan. When incorporated into a facility the university already needs, it can also provide a more practical return on capital investment than a dedicated shelter that remains unused during normal conditions.

The result is a building that contributes to campus life throughout the year while remaining

prepared for the moments when its protective role matters most.

More Than a Strong Roof

The roof is one of the largest exposed surfaces on any building and a critical part of the storm shelter envelope. During an extreme wind event, it may be subjected to significant uplift pressures, rapidly changing loads and windborne debris. Damage to one portion of the roof can expose other layers, compromise the interior environment or interrupt the continuous load path that transfers forces through the structure.

For that reason, a safe-room roof should be considered as a complete assembly rather than a series of interchangeable materials.

A typical integrated assembly may include a structural metal deck, insulation that supports both thermal efficiency and acoustic performance, an air barrier, a high-density gypsum cover board, and a finished metal roofing system. Each layer performs a specific function, but the overall value comes from the way those layers are designed and coordinated to work together.

The structural deck provides the foundation for the roof assembly and helps transfer loads into the supporting structure. Insulation supports energy efficiency and occupant comfort while helping control sound transmission and reverberation within large multi-use spaces. The air barrier supports continuity of the building enclosure and helps control uncontrolled airflow and moisture movement. A high-density cover board provides a stable substrate and can contribute to impact, fire and moisture performance, depending on the selected assembly. The finished roofing system provides long-term weather protection while contributing to the facility's architectural character.

The connections between these layers are equally important. Fastener type, spacing, attachment patterns, panel configuration, substrate compatibility and perimeter conditions can all affect performance. Substituting a seemingly comparable component or changing its attachment in the field may alter the behavior of the tested assembly.

This is why specifications for critical facilities must look beyond individual product data. A strong component does not automatically create a strong assembly.

Tested for Extreme Conditions

FEMA guidance and the ICC 500 standard establish a demanding framework for the design

and construction of storm shelters. ICC 500 provides minimum requirements for shelters intended to protect occupants from tornadoes, hurricanes and other high-wind events. FEMA P-361 provides additional guidance for the planning, design, construction and operation of safe rooms.

Testing of storm shelter envelope components can include windborne debris impact as well as static and cyclic pressure testing. Impact testing evaluates whether components and assemblies can resist representative debris propelled at high speed. Pressure testing evaluates how those assemblies respond to forces created by extreme winds, including repeated loading that can place stress on panels, fasteners, seams and connections.

These evaluations are far more demanding than ordinary weather-resistance testing. They are intended to assess whether the protective envelope will remain intact under conditions that can cause widespread damage to conventionally designed buildings.

Testing the full roof configuration also reduces uncertainty. It provides evidence of how the deck, insulation, cover board, roofing and attachment system perform together. This is especially important because the performance of one layer can depend heavily on the layers above and below it.

The specified assembly should therefore be treated as a coordinated system throughout design, procurement and installation. Field substitutions should be carefully reviewed by the appropriate design professionals and system provider before they are accepted.

The Value of a Single-Source Approach

Complex roof assemblies often involve materials from several manufacturers, separate technical representatives and warranties that begin and end at different layers. On a conventional project, those divisions can already complicate coordination. On a life-safety facility, they may introduce avoidable uncertainty.

Working with a single-source supplier for the complete roof assembly can simplify both design and long-term ownership. Rather than asking the architect, contractor or university to reconcile the requirements of multiple manufacturers, one provider can help coordinate the components from the structural deck through the finished roof.

This approach can offer several advantages:

- Greater compatibility among assembly components
- Clearer attachment and installation requirements
- More efficient technical review during design
- Fewer gaps between individual warranty provisions
- A more direct path for resolving questions during construction
- Centralized accountability if a performance issue develops

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A single-source warranty can be particularly valuable for facility managers. Traditional material warranties may cover individual products without addressing how those products interact. When responsibilities are divided, identifying the cause of an issue can become time-consuming, especially when moisture or air movement crosses several layers of the assembly.

Broader warranty coverage from one source can reduce that ambiguity. The exact terms, exclusions and responsibilities should always be reviewed, but a coordinated warranty provides a clearer framework for inspection, service and resolution. For an institution responsible for operating the facility over several decades, that clarity can be nearly as important as the initial material selection.

Performance Beyond the Storm

Although protection during severe weather is the defining requirement, a multi-use safe-room facility must perform well every day. That means the roof assembly must also support energy

efficiency, acoustics, moisture management, durability and occupant comfort.

Properly specified insulation helps control heat flow, reduce demands on mechanical systems and improve acoustics in gymnasiums, assembly halls and other large spaces where hard surfaces can contribute to excessive reverberation. Air-barrier continuity can help limit drafts, condensation risk and uncontrolled moisture movement. A durable metal roofing system can provide long service life, resistance to routine weather exposure and relatively straightforward maintenance.

These everyday benefits strengthen the business case for investing in a high-performance assembly. The university is not paying only for protection during an event that may or may not occur. It is investing in a roof that contributes to building performance during every class, practice, event and community gathering held beneath it.

Material durability also supports long-term campus planning. A roof designed for an

extended service life can reduce the frequency of replacement, limit disruption to occupied facilities and help control life-cycle costs. Routine inspections and preventive maintenance remain essential, but a well-coordinated assembly gives facility teams a stronger foundation for long-term stewardship.

Planning for Confidence

A successful community safe room begins with early collaboration among the university, architect, structural engineer, enclosure consultant, contractor and assembly provider. Occupancy, capacity, location, emergency access and operational planning must be considered alongside structural and enclosure requirements.

For the roof, early coordination allows the team to identify tested assemblies, confirm attachment requirements and address transitions and penetrations before construction begins. It also gives facility managers an opportunity to evaluate warranty coverage, inspection requirements and long-term maintenance responsibilities.

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No building can eliminate every risk associated with severe weather. Thoughtful planning can, however, give universities a more dependable place to protect people while strengthening the performance of a facility used every day.

By combining a versatile campus space with a tested, integrated roof assembly and clearly defined single-source responsibility, institutions can create facilities that deliver lasting value under normal conditions and greater confidence when conditions are anything but normal.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Since 1994, **IMETCO** has provided innovative metal roofing, wall, and building envelope systems. Through expert engineering, custom fabrication, and dedicated installation support, IMETCO helps architects and contractors bring design ideas to life with quality craftsmanship and comprehensive technical project guidance.

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How Universities can Specify Floors that Support Occupant Wellbeing and Align with Campus Sustainability Commitments

WHY MOBILE STAGING IS BECOMING AN ESSENTIAL PIECE OF CAMPUS EVENT INFRASTRUCTURE

BY TODD ALLISON

Higher education institutions have long led the way on sustainability, and today, that leadership is a genuine competitive advantage. According to The Princeton Review's College Hopes & Worries Survey 2026, 62% of students say that having information on a college's sustainability goals and commitments would influence their decision to apply or attend. As universities advance more sustainable campuses, one foundational element offers an outsized opportunity to make a difference: the floor.

As one of the largest surfaces in any building, flooring can be a powerful lever for improving indoor air quality, infection control, and occupant well-being. Thoughtful flooring specification—from material selection and certifications to maintenance protocols and end-of-life landfill avoidance solutions—empowers university facility managers and designers to create high-performing campus buildings that contribute to the wellbeing of the people who learn, live, and work in them.

Indoor Air Quality

When designing buildings that contribute to occupant wellbeing, one of the first factors to consider is indoor air quality. Indoor air quality (IAQ) has a measurable impact on occupants, from mold exposure to asthma and allergy triggers. According to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, common asthma triggers include, among other things, dust mites, pollen, molds, pet dander, and airborne irritants. Sources of indoor air pollution can hide in plain sight: cleaning products, paint, building products, new furniture and new carpet (which can off-gas fumes), and more. Specifying floors that support good IAQ includes prioritizing responsible materials, sustainable maintenance, and moisture management.

Responsible Materials

Responsible material selection starts with knowing what to avoid. Fortunately, the building and flooring industries have developed a clear set of tools to make that knowledge actionable.

The Green Science Policy Institute offers a practical way to identify and eliminate chemicals of concern: the Six Classes of Harmful Chemicals, which the institute categorizes as PFAS, antimicrobial treatments, flame retardants, bisphenols & phthalates, some solvents, and certain metals. Armed with this framework, campus planners can confidently specify flooring that is free of ortho-phthalates, PFAS, and antimicrobial treatments, and that carries low VOC emissions—all of which are chief among the most common concerns for floors.

Third-party certifications take the guesswork out of verification. When specifying flooring, the following are a few

reputable IAQ certifications building teams can look out for:

- FloorScore® certification, which confirms hard-surface flooring materials, adhesives, and underlayments meet strict IAQ emissions criteria referenced by LEED and other green building standards.
- Carpet and Rug Institute's Green Label Plus, which recognizes carpet, adhesive, and cushion products with the lowest VOC emissions on the market.
- UL GREENGUARD and GREENGUARD Gold Certifications, which indicate a product has low chemical emissions. The Gold Certification is especially apt for universities due to its distinguishment of "products that meet more stringent requirements often sought after in schools."
- Asthma & Allergy Friendly® certification, which signifies a product that has been scientifically proven to reduce exposure to asthma and allergy triggers from installation through daily cleaning.

Of course, published Health Product Declarations and Environmental Product Declarations remain a reliable way to identify manufacturers that are committed to material transparency, too. Together, these tools make it easy to specify with confidence.

Sustainable Maintenance

Every cleaning routine carries two costs: the labor to perform it and the chemicals used to get the job done. Forward-thinking facilities teams are specifying flooring solutions that keep both in check. No-finish products eliminate the need for periodic stripping and refinishing—cutting labor hours and reducing the volume of high-VOC strippers, sealers, and finishes that could otherwise impact IAQ with every maintenance cycle.

Maintenance strategy also plays a critical role in infection control, particularly across high-traffic campus zones like residence halls, dining halls, and campus health centers. Pathogens need three things to thrive: moisture, a food source (dirt and organic soil), and undisturbed places to settle. The

most effective flooring systems for infection control work by eliminating all three factors.

Continuous vinyl sheet flooring with heat-welded seams creates a monolithic surface, eliminating seams and small crevices where pathogens can hide. Even better is a floor that also has an integral cove base where the floor meets the wall. Instead of a typical 90-degree corner, an integral cove base is formed when the flooring is continued a few inches up the wall in a gentle radius, effectively removing the hard corner so dirt sweeps away easily. This also makes it easier to contain and clean spills.

The payoff for environmental services teams is significant. Having surfaces they can sweep, mop, and disinfect quickly with standard equipment is a real advantage when many are covering more square footage with fewer people. Plus, long-lasting, easy-to-maintain floors are proof that durability is itself a sustainability metric: Fewer replacements means less material waste and reduced lifecycle costs.

Moisture Management

According to the National Academies' Institute of Medicine Damp Indoor Spaces and Health report, damp indoor environments are widespread in buildings and are linked to increased mold growth and microbial activity, which, in turn, are associated with respiratory symptoms like coughing, wheezing, and asthma exacerbations. In fact, indoor dampness and mold exposure are estimated to contribute to approximately 21% of U.S. asthma cases—the leading chronic driver of the approximately 10 million school days missed annually due to asthma. For any building, moisture issues also bring financial stakes; for universities, stakes are multiplied even further, impacting not only maintenance budgets but also residence hall satisfaction and enrollment-driving campus reputation.

Indoor moisture is widely recognized as a key driver of IAQ, but the focus of moisture prevention operations and maintenance procedures is often placed on mechanical, plumbing, building envelopes, and site drainage. Moisture control on the floor is one of the most underestimated IAQ facility strategies.

continued...



PHOTO COURTESY TARKETT

It all starts at the slab. Concrete slabs have the potential to continuously generate and retain moisture vapor, which migrates upward through flooring assemblies and into occupied spaces. Hardened concrete is filled with microscopic pores and capillaries through which water can travel by capillary action, just like how a paper towel draws up a spill. Waterproof coatings and membrane systems can be used to limit moisture intrusion, but their long-term performance is dependent on substrate stability. As such, flooring is a powerful, often-underused tool in the moisture-control toolkit.

Not all flooring systems are created equally. Modular systems contain hundreds of seams that each act as a vapor pathway. A typical classroom may have 500–1,200 linear feet of seams, depending on the type of flooring, with each seam acting as a chimney for moisture. Soft-surface floors with porous open-cell backings contain voids that allow moisture to travel through, which could enable mold growth and subfloor contamination.

If carpet is needed or desired in a building with increased slab moisture, opt for closed-cell carpet backing systems, which can suppress moisture vapor movement. A wall-to-wall impermeable closed-cell flooring system addresses moisture at its source—isolating slab vapor from indoor air, limiting accumulation within the assembly, and

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helping limit localized humidity within the floor assembly to reduce the conditions that drive mold growth and occupant health risk.

End-of-Life Responsibility

When specifying flooring solutions that align with a campus's sustainability commitments, it's easy to end product evaluations with the material, manufacturing process, and daily maintenance requirements. But taking into account the product's eventual end of life is equally important, offering an opportunity for universities to participate in the circular economy through responsible specification.

Flooring manufacturers today have invested time and resources into innovative landfill-avoidance solutions for products that have reached the end of their life. For example, there are open-loop (i.e., when a material or product can be recycled into a different product) circular pathways for vinyl flooring systems that turn the old flooring into new

automotive mats. Closed-loop (i.e., when a material or product can be recycled back into its original form) circular solutions exist, too, like carpet tile backings that can be recycled into new backings.

Be sure to look carefully at the manufacturer, not just the product. It's one thing for a manufacturer to label a floor as recyclable, but it's another thing for the manufacturer to proactively ask for old flooring to be returned to them for recycling and landfill avoidance solutions. When working on a renovation, specify new floors with a manufacturer that will accept the old flooring through a take-back and recycling program, even if the old flooring wasn't theirs.

When specified intentionally and responsibly, flooring can be a strategic investment in campus productivity, sustainability, and occupant well-being. One decision can help support good indoor air quality, simplify maintenance,

guard against moisture, and keep material out of landfills, meaning a single thoughtful choice can pay dividends across wellbeing, operations, and sustainability goals at once. For the facility managers, designers, and procurement teams shaping the campuses of tomorrow, that makes the floor beneath their feet one of the most powerful tools they have.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Jay Henry leads Innovation and Sustainability at Tarkett North America, bringing over 30 years of flooring industry experience. He aligns strategy, product development, and operations to create customer-focused solutions that perform better, last longer, and reduce environmental impact.

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When the Campus Becomes the Venue

WHY MOBILE STAGING IS BECOMING AN ESSENTIAL PIECE OF CAMPUS EVENT INFRASTRUCTURE

BY TODD ALLISON

Picture a Friday night concert on the campus quad. Saturday brings an athletic celebration, Sunday a community gathering, and Monday the stage is somewhere completely different—ready for the next event. No permanent venue. No complicated construction project. No waiting for a rental company to arrive and build a temporary structure from scratch.

For private colleges and universities, where the demand for memorable campus experiences continues to stretch beyond traditional venues, a mobile stage can turn almost any outdoor space into an event destination. From commencement and homecoming to student concerts, athletic events, alumni gatherings and admissions programs, the right mobile stage can become a surprisingly versatile piece of campus infrastructure.

In this month's *PUPN* feature, we talked with Todd Allison of Progressive Products in Pittsburg, Kansas, about why colleges are taking a closer look at mobile stages—and how the right investment can deliver

flexibility, savings, safety and more opportunities to bring campus life outdoors.

A STAGE FOR MORE THAN ONE EVENT

PUPN: Why should private colleges and universities consider a mobile stage as an essential piece of their campus event infrastructure rather than simply an occasional-use purchase?

Todd Allison: For private colleges and universities that host commencement activities, homecoming events, student organization programs, concerts, donor gatherings, admissions events, and community functions

throughout the year, that flexibility creates value well beyond an occasional special event.

With a mobile stage, the school has a consistent, professional event platform without repeatedly renting temporary staging and coordinating outside crews.

Just as importantly, owning a mobile stage gives the university greater control over scheduling. When an event changes locations, a new program is added, or an opportunity comes up on short notice, the campus already has the infrastructure available.

Over time, the stage becomes less of an event purchase and more of a shared campus resource that can support student life, advancement, athletics, admissions, and community engagement.

FLEXIBILITY IS THE BIG ADVANTAGE

PUPN: What are the biggest advantages of a mobile stage compared with constructing or

renting a permanent stage for campus events and performances?

Allison: Mobile stages have the great advantage of flexibility. The stage can be moved to any place on campus.

Not only is this a great way to support events across campus, but it can also be moved to locations that can better accommodate events of various sizes. The stage isn't locked into one location, so neither is the event.

Furthermore, the stage can be used for off-campus activities—like a parade stand or for a community outreach event.

BRINGING THE EVENT TO THE PEOPLE

PUPN: Private colleges often host a wide variety of events—from concerts and commencement ceremonies to athletic events, student activities and community gatherings. How does a mobile stage provide the flexibility needed to accommodate these different uses?

Allison: A mobile stage gives colleges the flexibility to bring a professional event space directly to where it's needed.

Instead of designing every event around a permanent venue, the stage can move from the campus quad for a student concert to an athletic complex for game-day activities, then to another location for commencement, homecoming, alumni events, or community programs.

That mobility also allows schools to make better use of existing outdoor spaces. Parking lots, lawns, courtyards, and athletic fields can quickly become event venues without building permanent infrastructure.

Because the same stage can support everything from a small student activity to a large campus celebration, a mobile stage becomes a multipurpose resource that can serve numerous departments and organizations throughout the year.

It gives the university more options for where, when, and how it hosts events.

WHEN THE STAGE CAN PAY FOR ITSELF

PUPN: From a financial perspective, how can

investing in a mobile stage help a university reduce long-term events and staging costs, particularly when compared with repeatedly renting temporary staging?

Allison: It is more cost effective to own a stage than rent a stage. And the time to set up a mobile stage is less than setting up a manual outdoor structure.

A small mobile stage can be paid for in as few as 20 weekend events. In our area, that is less than a two-year payback.

Furthermore, banners on the stage can generate revenue through advertising and sponsorship income. Not only can a stage pay for itself, but it can also be an ongoing revenue stream that helps fund student activities.

LOOKING BEYOND THE PURCHASE PRICE

PUPN: What should facility managers look for when selecting a mobile stage in terms of durability, setup time, transportation, storage, weather resistance and overall ease of use?

Allison: Facility managers should look at a mobile stage as a long-term investment, not just an event-day purchase.

Durability matters, so the stage should be built to handle frequent use, transportation, changing weather conditions, and years of setup and teardown.

Ease of operation is just as important. A well-designed mobile stage should deploy quickly with a small, properly trained crew and minimize complicated assembly or loose components. Faster setup not only saves labor but allows campus staff to respond more easily to changing event schedules.

Transportation and storage should also fit the realities of the campus. Managers should consider the tow vehicle required, overall trailer dimensions, maneuverability through campus streets and parking areas, and where the stage will be stored when it isn't being used.

Finally, look closely at weather ratings, structural design, safety systems, maintenance requirements, and manufacturer support.

The best mobile stage for a college is one that staff can confidently transport, set up,

operate, maintain, and store without turning every event into a major production.

CREATING MORE CAMPUS EXPERIENCES

PUPN: How can a mobile stage enhance the student experience and support campus life by giving student organizations, athletic departments and performing arts programs more opportunities to host events?

Allison: A mobile stage can help turn more areas of campus into places where students can gather, perform and connect.

Instead of limiting events to traditional auditoriums or permanent venues, colleges can bring a professional event space directly to quads, athletic areas, parking lots and other outdoor locations.

That flexibility creates more opportunities for student organizations to host festivals, rallies and special events; athletic departments to enhance game-day and tailgating activities; and performing arts programs to take concerts and performances outside the traditional theater setting.

Most importantly, a mobile stage can make it easier for students to turn ideas into actual events.

By removing some of the logistical barriers associated with temporary staging, colleges can support a more active campus calendar and give students more opportunities to participate, perform, organize and build traditions that strengthen campus life.

SAFETY FIRST

PUPN: Safety is a major concern for campus facility and event managers. What safety features and certifications should colleges and universities consider when evaluating a mobile stage?

Allison: Safety should be one of the first considerations when evaluating a mobile stage.

Colleges should look for a stage that has been professionally engineered and comes with clear documentation for structural capacity, wind limitations, allowable rigging loads, guardrails, stairs, handrails and proper leveling and stabilization.



PHOTO COURTESY ASTRA STAGES

It is also important to understand which recognized building, structural, electrical and fire-safety standards apply to the stage and to the jurisdiction where it will be used.

Safety matters just as much as engineering. Features such as secure locking systems, clearly identified setup procedures, adequate fall protection and straightforward leveling can reduce the opportunity for mistakes.

The manufacturer should also provide thorough operator training, inspection guidelines and maintenance procedures.

Ultimately, a safe mobile stage is more than a well-built structure. It is a complete system supported by good engineering, proper documentation, trained operators and clearly defined operating limits.

WHERE MOBILE STAGING IS HEADED

PUPN: Looking ahead, how do you see mobile stages evolving to meet the changing needs of private colleges and universities, and what advice would you give campus decision-makers considering an investment today?

Allison: Mobile stages will continue to evolve toward faster setup, simpler operation,

greater versatility and improved safety.

For colleges and universities, that means stages that require smaller crews, accommodate more production equipment and can adapt to everything from an intimate campus gathering to a major commencement or concert.

We will also likely see greater integration of technology, improved weather monitoring and more efficient electrical, hydraulic and control systems.

For campus decision-makers, the key is to think beyond the next event.

Consider how the stage could serve the entire institution over many years and involve the departments that are likely to use it—facilities, student life, athletics, performing arts, advancement and admissions.

Most importantly, don't evaluate a mobile stage on purchase price alone.

Consider ease of operation, labor requirements, transportation, maintenance, manufacturer support, available accessories and the ability to adapt as campus events change.

A stage that is easy to use and flexible enough to support many departments can become a valuable piece of campus infrastructure rather than simply another piece of event equipment.

THE STAGE IS ONLY THE BEGINNING

The real value of a mobile stage may have very little to do with the stage itself.

It is about what happens when a college can say “yes” to more events, more locations and more opportunities to bring students and the campus community together.

As Allison explains, a mobile stage can move wherever the action is—from the quad to the athletic complex, from a parking lot to an outdoor celebration—and serve departments across the institution. Student organizations gain another place to gather. Athletics can create a bigger game-day experience. Performing arts programs can take performances outside the traditional theater. Advancement and admissions can create memorable events for alumni, donors and prospective students. And facility managers gain an asset that can be used again and again rather than serve as a temporary solution for a single weekend.

But flexibility doesn't mean sacrificing the fundamentals. Durability, safety, weather resistance, setup time, transportation, storage, training and manufacturer support all deserve a place at the decision-making table.

The smartest approach is to look beyond the next event and consider how a mobile stage could serve the entire campus for years to come.

Because sometimes the best way to create a new campus gathering place isn't to build another building.

It's to put the stage on wheels.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Todd Allison is a manufacturing executive, entrepreneur, educator, and artist with more than 30 years of experience. As CEO of Progressive Products / APEX Stages and President of Astra Stages, he combines business leadership, innovation, product development, and creative problem-solving.

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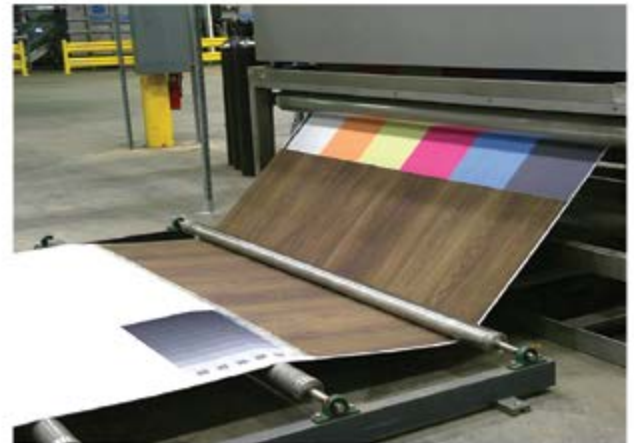




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Flotex's unique high-density flocked construction provides the perfect canvas for our new state-of-the-art digital printer. Each upright fiber is individually printed in a 3-step process, resulting in beautiful, high-definition visuals. Choose from our wide selection of patterns and designs, re-color patterns to match your aesthetic, or create your own custom designs including logos and mascots. Available in sheet, tile, and plank formats. The possibilities are endless!

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