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New Allstream Centre Opens to Accolades

Toronto, October 22, 2009 – His Worship Mayor David Miller and Deputy Mayor Joe Pantalone, Chair, Board of Governors of Exhibition Place, officially opened the Allstream Centre, the NORR Limited designed, state-of-the-art, new conference centre in the gloriously restored 1929 Automotive Building. Mr. Miller and Mr. Pantalone were unstinting in their praise for the facility design and in their lofty expectations of the Allstream Centre's impact on the Toronto economy.

The Allstream Centre will enhance Toronto's position as a key destination for the convention and conference industry, with a world class venue that demonstrates leadership in functionality and sustainability as well as design excellence and heritage conservation and restoration.

On opening day, guided tours for the Allstream Centre focused on its architectural details, heritage character, sustainable design features and superior technology.

NORR provided full architectural, interior design, structural, mechanical and electrical engineering services for this project.

NORR's Design Principal, David Clusiau explained, 'This exceptional project provided us with a remarkable opportunity to meet our client's commercial requirements creatively, while at the same time, honouring this building's important place in our city'

NORR was chosen to design the new centre because of their unique combination of LEED® expertise, and a strong track record in the design of convention, conference and special event buildings around the world.

NORR's experience includes: the programming of the Ottawa Congress Centre, the renovation and expansion of the Toronto Congress Centre, Oshawa's General Motors Centre, the 257,000 sf South Okanagan Event Centre in British Columbia, the MotorCity Casino entertainment complex, hotel and convention centre in Detroit, the Moncton Destination Casino complex, hotel and convention centre in New Brunswick, Mazagan resort and convention centre in Morocco as well as Atlantis the Palm in Dubai.

For the Allstream Centre, NORR's assignment was to transform the existing exhibition hall into a ballroom and convention centre, creating a highly functional and efficient facility, retaining and restoring the heritage Art Deco components of the 1920's building, while incorporating the long term sustainability goals of Exhibition Place. The design solution celebrates the heritage character, restoring the exterior to its original glory, and using it as design inspiration for the new interior spaces.

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Flexible Venue

Increasingly, event organizers are seeking flexible tradeshow facilities that combine both suitable exhibition space and multiple meeting rooms.

NORR has designed that flexibility into the new Allstream Centre. The heart of the new facility is a 45,000 square foot, column-free, 3,000-seat ballroom, which will be used for conferences, galas, weddings, receptions and exhibitions. Significant features include:

- Movable 30 ft high acoustic walls enabling subdivision for diverse meeting uses
- Floor port service outlets – power, data, communications, water
- Trade show and event power distribution
- Flexible event rigging points

On the second floor, a number of conference rooms of varying sizes can be configured for various types of breakout sessions.

Structural Challenge:

The ballroom, largest in Canada and second largest in North America, established a key design feature for the building and presented the chief structural challenge. The existing structure had a central, 2 storey high space surrounded on all sides by a mezzanine level. The roof of the central space was supported by rows of columns at the edge of the mezzanine and a row of columns running down the centre of the space.

The failing state of the original gypsum roof panels, combined with the desire to create a huge, column-free ballroom space led NORR to completely replace the roof structure with cost-effective, long-span joists, at 150 feet, the longest ever installed in Canada. This challenging task included:

- Removal of centre columns to create ballroom clear span of 150 feet
- New structure provides seismic bracing of entire building
- New central structure foundation on caissons to bedrock
- New joist capacity supports hung loads for events and shows
- New roof deck is acoustically perforated to reduce sound reverberation
- New joists carry 30 foot high acoustic track mounted partitions
- Infill floor bay at west end provides 4,500 sf of additional second floor space
- Replacement of centre slab on grade to accommodate show floor service

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Historic Exterior Restoration

In order to retain the character of the original building, the NORR team determined and directed an extensive masonry repair and restoration program:

- Complete rebuilding of the deteriorated central high parapet and setback parapets and new flashings
- Rebuilding of corner parapets
- Reproducing the original wall construction with improved structural anchoring
- Replacement of failed cast stone units on the face of the parapets
- Rebuilding two entrance columns at the North entrance
- Replacement of damaged carved stone features
- Masonry cleaning, brick replacement, mortar joint repointing
- Stitch repairs to major building corner cracks
- Localized reconstruction of the bond between the interior brick and the exterior cast stone with helical anchors and pressure grouting
- Re-support of Juliet balconies

In addition, the building envelope upgrades also adhered to the heritage character:

- Removal of opaque insulated window infill panels
- Complete replacement of building exterior windows and doors with heritage inspired new thermally broken aluminium framing and sealed insulated vision glass units
- Removal and reinstallation of cast iron spandrel panels on new structural framing supports

Interior Restoration

To recapture the dramatic arrival experience of the original building, there was extensive retention and restoration of heritage elements in both the North and South Lobbies, in addition to the removal of an unfortunate 1970s curtain wall and reinstatement of the original exterior entry porch:

- Art Deco heritage elements – coffered ceilings, decorative friezes, chamfered columns, light fixtures, terrazzo flooring and stair railings and handrails
- Restoration of walls and ceiling to their 1929 original appearance and colors using a traditional lime based plaster mix on gypsum lath
- Repairs to damaged pilasters, reconstruction of decorative panels
- Installation of terrazzo at North Lobby in accordance with original heritage drawings
- Extension and repair of terrazzo flooring at South Lobby
- Replacement of failing North and South Lobby stairs
- Extended stone base at the North Lobby due to lowered floor slab providing barrier free access

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- Feature wall to preserve and expose evidence of the historical Don Valley Brick wall construction
- Heritage Interpretive Displays at feature wall
- Refurbishment of existing Art Deco lighting fixtures
- Re-use of heritage railings

Daylight Flooded Interiors

The original 1929 building provided daylight to the major interior display space through glazed peaks along the roof trusses. Over the years, this approach fell out of fashion with event planners and the glazing was removed in preference to a black box approach to control event lighting. This major renovation provided the opportunity to retain event light control but re-introduce natural light to the main entry circulation North hall by creating a 3-storey foyer with clerestory windows. In addition, the East ballroom wall is retractable, permitting a flood of natural light into the main space.

In addition, in the South corridor, by removing obsolete service rooms and positioning new meeting rooms on interior, NORR's designers created a sun-filled promenade and break-out space all along the south edge of the building, with views of the lawn and the lake beyond.

Throughout the interior transformation, new configurations and design details were selected to complement the old. Distinctive features such as the 40-foot high stone relief wall and the heritage handrail in the main hall and the Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired geometric design of the ceiling in the ballroom.

The corridors use an abundance of natural light, wooden portals and neutral colours to create a warm tone that serves as a backdrop to the human activity that will fill the spaces. The furniture was selected for its simple lines, but also for its practicality and portability.

Sustainable Design

Environmental responsibility was another driving force for this project for which NORR employed a whole-building approach to sustainability

On-track for LEED® Silver certification, the Allstream Centre will be the first LEED® certified conference centre on Canada.

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The Silver certification will be based on features such as:

- Sustainable site selection
- Re-use of building
- Heat island reduction using a new, highly reflective roof, minimizing impact on microclimate
- Waste water reduction (30%), using low flow fixtures
- Elimination of CFCs, compounds with negative environmental effects including ozone depletion
- Low emitting and low VOC (volatile organic compound) materials
- Thermal comfort compliance and monitoring for maximum control of comfort performance and effectiveness
- Optimized energy performance
- Green power
- Measurement and verification
- Construction waste diversion (75%), using the 3 R's: reduce, reuse, and recycle to minimize the amount of construction debris sent to landfill
- Recycled content (15%)
- Best practice commissioning
- CO2 monitoring
- IAQ (internal air quality) monitoring / control during construction

NORR

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For further information contact:

Susanne Simic, Simic Public Relations for the Ingenium Group
416-622-3358 susanne.simic@sympatico.ca