

# A Towering A Achievement

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PHOTOS BY ROBERT TAYLOR



## The Gaylord Family Oklahoma Memorial Stadium

The dramatic expansion and **renovation** of the OU campus' most dominant structure was a three-year undertaking compressed into 19 months, requiring close cooperation, dedication and a commitment to finishing on time and on budget.

**A**rthur Grant Evans could have chosen from literally dozens of architectural styles for his budding institution, but the University of Oklahoma's second president selected Collegiate Gothic—subsequently tagged “Cherokee Gothic” by the eminent architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Almost a century later, the campus' most dominant structure at last has been brought into harmony with President Evans' red-brick and limestone façades.

On the southwest corner of Brooks Street and Jenkins Avenue stands the Gaylord Family Oklahoma Memorial Stadium, a unique edifice built in honor of fallen war heroes that has been home to an endless parade of football giants over the past eight decades. Its hallowed grounds have been the site for countless moments of glory, drama, heartbreak and incredible success stories, the ghosts of yesterday fusing with the stars of today, spirit and spirits experienced on so many different levels. Never has that been truer than this autumn as the University put the finishing touches on Phase I of an \$83 million project to expand and renovate the 79-year-old facility.

On August 30, 2003, a then-record crowd of 83,073 watched the Sooners, dressed in retro Bud Wilkinson-era uniforms as a tribute to their illustrious past, beat the University of North Texas 37-3. The game was the first to be played in the revamped stadium that includes 7,672 additional seats as part of a new east-side upper deck. The crowd was the largest to witness a sporting event in Oklahoma, although the record was re-established at 84,027 when the Sooners hosted Bedlam rival Oklahoma State on November 1.

“This stadium is considered a shrine by many Oklahoma football fans. It's been the site for not just the greatest OU football games, but for some of the greatest games in college football history,” explains OU athletics director Joe Castiglione. “People respect this facility. It is revered in many ways. Because it is a unique structure and because of our respect for the existing tradition, we were very mindful of how we went about renovating this stadium.

“One of our main goals was to not only preserve the history, but enhance it.”

As a result, Evans' fingerprints remain unmistakable, even though his tenure as University president ended a decade before initial plans and fund-raising efforts for a student union building and a 42,500-seat football stadium were launched in 1922. The initial west-side phase of what would become Oklahoma Memorial Stadium was completed in time for the 1925 season, and the east side of the facility opened three years later. Several additions were added over the years.

When OU's current brain trust began mapping plans for the aggressive renovation project set to begin in December 2001, there was little question about the style and ultimate direction it would follow.

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Observers and officials alike held their breath as construction workers raced toward a no-choice deadline of August 30, 2003, for completion of the stadium, the largest single project ever undertaken at the University of Oklahoma. A crimson-and-cream swarm of Sooners appeared at the 2003 season opener, tickets in hand, to occupy 83,073 brand-new seats that included 7,672 added as part of the soaring east-side upper deck.





The two tiers of 18-seat, glass-walled Stadium Suites are located just above and below the Kerr McGee Stadium Club in the expanded east side, affording a magnificent view of the field.

“The success of the Great Expectations campaign allowed us to be very aggressive in our plans to renovate Memorial Stadium.”



The completion of the first 27 lower-tier luxury suites brought forth an instant demand to lease the additional 27 upper-tier suites scheduled as part of the project's Phase II. The new suites, each offering a full range of entertainment amenities, were all sold by the end of the year and will be ready for occupancy next fall when the Sooners kick off the 2004 season.

“We wanted to make these improvements and expand the stadium and make it look like it was part of the original structure,” added Castiglione, who also wanted the edifice to blend with the surrounding academic buildings.

Mission accomplished, sort of.

The Cherokee Gothic influence is obvious in the expanded east and north sides. The trademark brick and cast stone provide a characteristic common to many of the buildings across the campus, including the Oklahoma Memorial Student Union and Evans Hall, the administration building named for the second president.

But this stadium is so much more than a salute to the tradition. It is a congregation of past, present and future that has provided the Sooners with a home that will be the envy of their Big 12 brethren, as well as national rivals.

“I think it is special that our administration—President (David) Boren and Joe Castiglione—have continued to develop our athletics program and really, our entire University,” says head football coach Bob Stoops. “If you look around campus, there is construction going on everywhere. It shows their vision and also shows that we are not going to stand still.”

The project commenced in 1997 with a five-year fundraising campaign, appropriately titled “Great Expectations,” with an original goal of \$25 million. The drive's main focus was to finance major capital athletic projects, bringing up-to-date many of the University's athletic facilities that were overdue for at least a facelift. By late 2000 the goal was expanded to \$100 million, which then included \$50 million in renovations to the stadium.

The ongoing success of OU's Athletics Department spurred interest in the fund-raising effort, and when Stoops guided the Sooners to the 2000 national football championship, the timetable for reaching such a lofty goal was accelerated.

“The success of the Great Expectations campaign allowed us to be very aggressive in our plans to renovate Memorial Stadium,” says Castiglione, pointing to a 19-month plan for completion of a project that easily could have required up to three years to finish.

Phase I of the expansion and renovation centered around a towering new east side that includes an upper deck, 27 luxury sky suites, the Kerr McGee Stadium Club and a club seating section. New perimeter fencing, a new scoreboard and clock tower, enlarged east and north concourse areas with improved amenities, and renovations to the press box and existing luxury suites were also high on the project list, along with plans to give the stadium exterior a major makeover of brick and glass.

The deadline was set for the 2003 season opener, a challenge embraced by the University, along with the project architect, HOK Sport, and the construction team of Flintco, Inc. The projected price tag of the initial phase is \$73 million, with Phase II costs expected to be near \$10 million.

HOK Sport, renowned for designing such venues as Baltimore's Camden Yards, Pacific Bell Park in San Francisco, Coors Field in Denver and the Alamodome in San Antonio, delivered the plans for the ambitious project in late 2001. Flintco immediately went to work, under the coordinating

efforts of the University's Architectural and Engineering Services staff, including director Mike Moorman, assistant director and project manager David Nordyke, construction administrator Bill Forester and interior designer Rick Skaggs.

"We knew from the beginning it was really an aggressive project, and that it was going to take a maximum effort by a lot of people," explains Larry Naifeh, OU executive associate athletics director and coordinator for the athletics capital improvement projects. "Any way you looked at it, it was going to be a tight finish. We knew it was going to be one crew pushing the other crew in front of it to get their part done in time."

Even before the first brick was laid on the east side's upper deck expansion, the venerable structure took on a new look to the west via a \$20-million multi-level parking facility that also

houses OU's expanded ticket offices and the main University Bookstore location. This separate University project was coordinated by University Parking and Transportation Services in collaboration with the stadium project team.

The Athletics Department offices, as well as the Prentice Gautt Academic Center, located in the north end of the stadium, were completely renovated as part of Phase I and are now contained in the McClendon Center for Intercollegiate Athletics. The entire bowl portion of the venue above Owen Field was treated to a fresh coat of paint, and all existing stadium seats—both bench and chair back varieties—were replaced. Red brick replaced plaster and stucco barriers at the base of the field's retaining wall, and historic section signage was installed throughout interior walkways. *continued*

## WHAT'S IN A NAME

The Gaylord Family Oklahoma Memorial Stadium stands just northeast of the emerging Gaylord Hall, home of the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication. Both structures pay homage to the foresight and generosity of the late Edward L. Gaylord, Oklahoma's most powerful newspaper publisher and architect of a financial empire reaching far into the entertainment, hotel and media industries.

Gaylord died on April 27, 2003, at the age of 84, after a long and courageous battle with cancer. Although he did not live to see his most visible benefactions to the University of Oklahoma completed, he had the satisfaction of seeing the results of hundreds of gifts he made, often anonymously, to the University and other institutions, his community and church, and countless individuals.

Taking the helm of the Oklahoma Publishing Company and *The Daily Oklahoman* in 1974 upon the death of his father, the pioneer state newspaperman E. K. Gaylord, Ed Gaylord acquired radio and television outlets, purchased the giant Opryland complex in Nashville, Tennessee, formed Gaylord Entertainment as a publicly traded company and bought the famed Broadmoor Hotel and Resort in Colorado Springs.

His civic leadership in his hometown of Oklahoma City is credited with turning the nearly bankrupt State Fair of Oklahoma into one of the most profitable state fairs in the country. Likewise, his efforts rescued the faltering National Cowboy Hall of Fame, now the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, one of the finest western art museums in the world.

A graduate of Stanford and Harvard, Gaylord and his late wife, Thelma, adopted a number of OU causes, individually and on behalf of the Gaylord family. His \$22 million gift to journalism and mass communication elevated that school to college status, funded construction of a state-of-the-art facil-

ity, provided scholarships and faculty support.

A great Sooner football and basketball fan, Gaylord made the \$12 million contribution that enabled the University to complete the expansion and renovation of the stadium. When President David Boren and the OU Regents asked to join the Gaylord family name to Oklahoma Memorial Stadium, he consented only if part of his gift be used to construct a suitable, long-absent memorial to OU's war dead, the structure's original honorees.

In addition to his wife, Thelma; his parents, E. K. and Inez Kinney Gaylord; and a grandson, Jimmy Everest, Ed Gaylord was preceded in death by his sister, Edith Kinney Gaylord, a long-time University benefactor. His daughter, Christy Everest, also a major OU benefactor with her husband, Jim, is a former University of Oklahoma Foundation trustee and currently serves as an OU Regent. His other children and their spouses, all also OU supporters and advisors, are daughters Louise Bennett and her husband Clay and Mary McClean and her husband Jeff, and son E. K. Gaylord II and his wife Natalie. Other survivors include nine grandchildren and a sister, Virginia Neely.



**Edward L. Gaylord**

## “There is a lot of history and tradition inside those walls.”

Another formidable job was the rerouting of Jenkins Avenue, which previously ran parallel to the east side of the stadium. Due to the magnitude of the expansion, the street had to be looped around the addition between Lindsey and Brooks.

From an electronic standpoint, the big screen video board in the south end zone was upgraded to a new state-of-the-art 23mm ProStar Plus Display Board, measuring 21 feet high by 37 feet wide. The new system features a higher quality picture with superior overall capabilities. The old video board was disassembled and repositioned on the east and west sides of the upper deck facing. Each side strip measures 3 feet high by 119 feet long and can be used for graphics, scores and special effects.

The stadium also features a new Galaxy Board in the north end zone, on the backside of the clock tower. The multifunctional, 24 feet by 32 feet screen, featuring amber displays, is used primarily as a scoreboard and information board. Engineers also reconfigured the venue's sound system, which had been a sore spot with fans for years. The upgrade has contributed to enhanced audio throughout the stadium.

Although home to seven national championship teams, Oklahoma Memorial Stadium long had worn the look of neglect. But the new project promised and delivered dramatic modifications that were witnessed firsthand by Sooner fans during the 2003 season.

“Unfortunately, the stadium has not been kept up like it should have been over the years. That's not a criticism; it's something that was consistent with what was happening around the country,” says Castiglione. “A lot of universities let their facilities lapse into a deteriorated state. That's why you see so

many schools renovating or building new stadiums these days.”

Even some of the football legends who previously had called Oklahoma Memorial Stadium home were becoming uncomfortable with the aesthetics of the venue.

“It's been a great old place over the years. There is a lot of history and tradition inside those walls,” offers former coach Barry Switzer. “But even with all of the changes that came back in the '70s and '80s, it really needed a lot of work. It's great to see what OU is doing right now with the stadium.

“They've been mindful of the tradition. You can see that in the way they are keeping it in the traditional Gothic style that ties it in with a lot of other buildings on campus. That's important.”

Halfway through the construction process, the University announced a \$12 million contribution from Oklahoma City publisher Edward L. Gaylord, on behalf of his family, to complete Phase I. To honor the gift, the stadium was renamed “Gaylord Family Oklahoma Memorial Stadium,” and Gaylord requested that a portion of the donation be used to build a monument to all OU students, faculty and staff who died while serving their country in the U.S. Armed Forces. Remarkably, the stadium originally named to honor OU's war dead never featured any sort of architectural tribute, as did its counterpart structure, Oklahoma Memorial Union.

With funding in place, the calendar became the biggest obstacle.

“The biggest hurdle on this job was time, maintaining a schedule and getting everything completed by a certain date,” says Flintco project manager J.D. Walker. “The key is your

ability to hit on all cylinders, and to do that, the architect, contractor and (University) have to work well together. A good relationship between those parties lends itself very handily to that scenario because you've got to have all of those people pulling or working in the same direction to accomplish your goals.”

Flintco funneled thousands of man-hours into the project, giving new meaning to the phrase, “burning the midnight oil.” In an effort to remain on schedule and meet its August deadline, the stadium lights were used to provide safe working conditions almost every night over the final few months of Phase I.

By midsummer 2003, the construction team that fluctuated between 600 and 800 workers had laid 1.4 million bricks and poured more than 16,000 cubic yards of concrete. The façade was topped off with 7,292 pieces of stone trim.



A far cry from the gravel-floored stadium east side of past student memories, the renovated east side features wide, light-and-bright concourses, 68 additional points of sale to appease fan appetites for game food and other merchandise and 16 new restrooms, setting a new standard that Phase II of the project will bring to the west side over the next two years.



The holders of 2,200 outdoor club seats can access the spacious east side Kerr McGee Stadium Club on game days for full buffets or more traditional stadium fare, all within sight of multiple television screens. As with the west side Santee Lounge, which will undergo complete refurbishing in Phase II, the new club is available at other times for University entertaining.

The countdown to OU's season opener began, and the construction went into its final stages. Other eye-opening numbers included 16 new restrooms, an additional 68 points-of-sale, 4,500 upper deck seats, 2,200 club seats, 486 suite seats and 486 club mezzanine seats.

"It was tough, but we hit every one of the goals we set for ourselves, including the most difficult one—getting the stadium project done on time and on budget," says Castiglione.

The magnificent new facility still needed a bit of polishing by the time North Texas arrived in Norman to meet the Sooners. But the initial phase was 95 percent complete and ready for public occupancy.

"We had to make the deadline—that wasn't a choice," says Randy Elliott, project director for Flintco.

The final product has received across-the-board rave reviews. Stoops and his program are thrilled with their new home, and many of the players from past teams have given their "thumbs up," as well.

"It's incredible. To be able to play your games in a place like this in front of an even greater crowd than we already had—we are very, very fortunate," says Stoops. "It is a first-class facility in every way you can imagine. It's a place our players, coaches, fans and entire University can be proud of for years to come. It certainly won't hurt our home-field advantage."

The new look made an impression on two-time All-American linebacker George Cumby, who was invited back for the season opener as part of a tribute to all the first-team All-Americans in OU history.

"I've been in a lot of stadiums, but nothing quite like this," says Cumby, who played six seasons with the NFL's Green Bay Packers. "It shows how the tradition and history are still important, but also how the program is continually moving

forward. I was amazed."

Most importantly, the fans gave the place a unanimous stamp of approval.

The noise level and all the extra amenities add to the overall atmosphere, helping elevate Gaylord Family Oklahoma Memorial Stadium to one of the best collegiate football venues in the country.

"I think everyone notices it. The dynamics of sitting in this stadium are different; there is a different kind of intimacy that didn't exist before," adds Castiglione. "I truly believe this stadium can hold its own in any discussion about stadiums. There are some that are still larger, but larger doesn't necessarily mean better."

With the bulk of the initial stadium project completed, attention will focus on the west side of the facility and Phase II, which figures to be ongoing over the next season or possibly two. Work on the west concourse includes upgrades of restrooms and concessions, enhancing the exterior of the press box and reworking some of the stadium's older brick and concrete work. More perimeter fencing will be added around the program's practice facility on the far south end of the stadium.

Capping off Phase II will be the finishing out of a second level of luxury suites on the east side and the refurbishing of the Santee Lounge, located below the west side press box and original suites.

"The project is about attention to detail as much as anything, making this facility something very special," adds Naifeh. "There are a lot of people who share the sense of pride we have in our program and University, and that permeates itself in everything we do. I think you see that when you look at this project."

President Evans was an ardent early-day football fan long before Oklahoma established its rich tradition as a national power. Just imagine his pride in seeing the game played in such a grand setting—and one perfectly in style with its surroundings.

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*ABOUT THE AUTHOR:* Sooner Magazine sports contributor Jay C. Upchurch is a veteran sportswriter and currently editor of *Sooners Illustrated*. He is also the author of the recently published *Tales from the Sooner Sidelines*, a collection of behind-the-scenes anecdotes spanning the Wilkinson, Switzer and Stoops eras, with a foreword by Barry Switzer. The book is available at major Norman/Oklahoma City bookstores, on Amazon.com and on SportsPublishingLLC.com.