UMD's Cina Hall greets brand new day

By Brady Slater on Aug 31, 2016 at 6:45 p.m.
Call it the "new hall smell," that sweet lumber scent emanating throughout the first floor of Cina Hall on the University of Minnesota Duluth on Wednesday.
As students hustled through the hall and construction workers took aim at finishing touches, the $4.1 million renovation of Cina Hall could be smelled, seen and felt.

There was air conditioning for the first time since the building was constructed in the 1950s. Glossy black terrazzo floors popped visually — inlaid with bold and brilliantly colored flowers outlined in brass piping and representative of Ojibwe beadwork.

"It's an homage to that tradition and it's immediately recognizable," said Jill Doerfler, assistant professor and head of the Department of American Indian Studies.

Having been displaced throughout the 2015-16 school year into nooks and crannies throughout the campus, Doerfler and 71 other faculty and staff members that call Cina Hall their professional home were glad to be back.

"They did a wonderful job," said Adam Pine, an assistant professor in the geography department.

One of the busiest buildings on UMD's interconnected campus, Cina Hall is home to several liberal arts programs and is a popular thoroughfare for students going from upper to lower campus.

But prior to renovation, it was past its due date, falling short of modern air-circulation codes and harboring asbestos flooring, old lighting and paltry amenities. Pine said he used to paste newspapers onto his office window to block the sun's glare from his computer screen.

"Now, I've got blinds," Pine said, adding that he would work in libraries and at home in the summers, avoiding the heat that cooked the offices and made them unbearable places in which to concentrate.

The decision to renovate rather than rebuild was both cost-saving and conscientious, said Chancellor Lendley Black in a news release earlier this week that announced the building being put back into use.
"This is a great example of asset preservation and the importance of optimizing our current facilities while providing an improved learning experience for our students," Black said.

The renovation was paid for with Higher Education Asset Preservation and Renovation funds from the state Legislature, with additional funding from UMD resources, said John Kessler, UMD's facilities project manager.

Kessler led a media tour that showcased updates such as energy-efficient LED lighting, a first-time sprinkler system, heat registers that replaced steam with hot water and textured transition strips on the floors at either end of the building that will allow for users with visual impairments to recognize when they're entering and exiting into the other halls.

No amenity was better received than the cool circulating air.

"The air conditioning has been a godsend," Kessler said. "That's the biggest comment we're getting so far."

But for all the modernities, the style is what showed brightest, including the warm orange accents painted throughout the building on its lakeside walls.

"The Anishinaabe believe that as the sun rises in the east, so too does everything come with the new day," Kessler said.