The DePaul Center reflects the creative application of architecture to revitalize a Chicago landmark while simultaneously helping DePaul University create a distinct image for its downtown campus.

Located in the heart of Chicago, the once-abandoned Goldblatt department store building stood empty for nearly a decade. Preliminary efforts were underway by the city to tear down the building, despite its listing on the historic register, until DePaul University stepped forward with adaptive reuse plans designed by Daniel P. Coffey & Associates, Ltd., Chicago. The plan called for a mixed-use center to be occupied by DePaul University, general offices and retail.

Originally built in the early 1900s as an off-price department store, the Goldblatt building was purchased by the city of Chicago in 1981 to be the site of the “new” Chicago Central Library. Drawings were ready for bid, but political and media pressure dictated that the library be the result of new construction. With the project’s cancellation, no other suitable use was anticipated and the building stood abandoned.

Realizing the need to centralize, anchor and expand their downtown campus, DePaul purchased the 11-story, 650,000-square-foot building in 1991. The university was overflowing its three existing buildings, which contained over 400,000 square feet of academic space and

The DePaul Center at Chicago’s DePaul University got a new look thanks to an adaptive reuse plan designed for the old Goldblatt department store. The photo above shows the abandoned building before the renovation; on our cover is the “after” photo.
RENOVATION DETAILS

Under the renovation and adaptive reuse plan, every system of the Goldblatt building was replaced, substantially repaired or significantly modified. A recap of the renovation reveals how a new building was essentially developed within an old shell.

External renovations included the following:
• **Strategic demolition** of the north facade and selected interior components of the building and of an adjoining 40-foot-wide retail building on the corner of State and Jackson Streets.
• **Northern grounds:** A new courtyard/plaza and entryway were constructed on the site after demolition of the existing building.
• **North facade:** Removal of an 11-story brick fire-wall to its original steel structure and the construction of a new precast and window wall in its place.
• **East facade:** Tuckpointing 11 stories with new windows, fan room louvers cut into the facade.
• **South and West facades:** Full repair and replacement of more than 1,000 pieces of terra cotta and rebuilding of the “Chicago style” windows on all 11 stories.
• **Roof:** 50,000 square feet of roof structure replaced with new skylights, drainage systems and an outdoor roof-top terrace.

• **Lighting:** Creative application of exterior lighting used to highlight and amplify all facades and the exterior atrium.

Internal renovations included the following:
• **Structural systems:** The cutting of new elevator shafts and filling of existing holes in the structure, as well as creation of several atria.
• **Mechanical systems:** Installation of new fans, ductwork, boilers and cooling systems.
• **Electrical and lighting systems:** Installation of a new electrical system and custom lighting features.
• **Conveyance systems:** Installation of 14 new passenger elevators and two large freight elevators, a series of skyway bridges connecting the former Goldblatt building to the Lewis and O’Malley Buildings, which stood adjacent to the Goldblatt building. New escalators from the first-floor lobby to the concourse level, which will eventually become a new subway station.
• **Fire protection system:** The building is equipped with a state-of-the-art fire suppression and life safety system that meets the stringent “highrise” provisions of the Chicago Building Code.
Effectively bringing these elements together would result in the creation of a new civic institution that could dramatically change the previously blighted and depressed south Loop area of State Street.

functional adjacencies between the academic, administrative and support spaces at the campus.

Therefore, design plans focused on unification of the physically fragmented urban university while creating a whole new image for DePaul’s Loop campus. But DePaul officials realized the university could not fully occupy the building and as a result, the redesign incorporated a mixed-use concept integrating academic, office and retail uses. Also integral to the redesign was establishing an image to reflect the university and its urban mission, entrance to convey the building’s new image. After careful analysis, it was determined that the north facade, located on the high-profile corner of State and Jackson Streets, would be the most appropriate place to anchor the building and the campus.

The north facade was originally a blank brick firewall joined to an abandoned, non-descript two-story retail building. The wall and the retail building were demolished in the first phase of renovation.

The proportions of the north face appeared relatively squat and chunky and required special treatments to appear taller. Two-story glazed units framed by architectural precast concrete were designed to provide an illusion of height to the building. In addition, a one-story-high “floating” cornice was placed at the top to offset the fact that the edge of the north face was one story shorter than the south face.

Architectural precast concrete also was used to simulate the his-
toric look of the rest of the building, which was ornately decorated with terra cotta. To keep all remaining facades consistent with the overall upgraded image of the building, extensive terra cotta repair was conducted. After a visual examination of the existing terra cotta, a plan was devised to repair or replace more than 1,000 pieces on the south and west walls.

The area where the smaller building stood was redeveloped into an urban park to create a “welcoming” effect to the main entrance. Benches, architectural lighting and landscaping were used to amplify this effect.

Through the master planning process, the university clarified its internal goals and decided that the DePaul Center would be a dynamic, people-oriented project, utilizing floors six through 11 to concentrate the most intense university populations into the building. A student union, cafeteria, campus library, major classroom clusters, conference center and all student-related administrative areas were placed in the new center.

The speculative office areas, floors two through five, were occupied by the city of Chicago as part of the purchase agreement with DePaul University. The result of the agreement is very low occupancy costs, which will save the city’s taxpayers millions of dollars in leasing agreements over the next 20 to 30 years. The space will become available to DePaul in the future, should growth continue at the Loop Campus.

The general retail area, first floor and concourse level, has been recast as a “Music Mart,” where the majority of the tenants are from the music retail industry. At the retail center, customers can buy sheet music, a popular compact disc or even a piano. The genesis of the idea was the long-standing but failing tradition of the south Loop area as the home to numerous musical retail establishments and the music center of Chicago.

To accomplish a retail center within an academic and office building, special care was taken with regard to grade and concourse level circulation/interconnection. Richly developed mahogany storefronts, a block-long retail gallery and a central atrium were designed to form a sequence of urban shopping experiences which are highlighted by daily, DePaul-programmed noon-time concerts at the base of the atrium.

The result of the $65 million renovation was the successful creation of the DePaul Center, an active university anchor with two successful public spaces, the outdoor plaza and the interior atrium.

The renovation established an identifiable university landmark that reflects the academic quality for which the university is known, and has transformed a once-abandoned white elephant into an anchor for the south Loop area.

About the Author
Daniel P. Coffey, AIA, is a founding principal of Daniel P. Coffey & Associates, Ltd., Chicago. Daniel P. Coffey & Associates, Ltd. is a full-service architecture, interior design, urban design and land planning firm with projects in Illinois, Michigan, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Florida and California.