

Project Profile



Project

Cowles Hall, Elmira College
Elmira, New York

Owner

Elmira College
Elmira, New York

Roofing Contractor

Charles F. Evans Company, Inc.
Elmira, New York

Architect

QPK Design
Syracuse, New York

Construction Manager

Welliver McGuire, Inc.
Montour Falls, New York

Roofing System

Décor Roof System using
60 mil Sarnafil® G410
feltback membrane in lead gray

Project Size

33,000 square feet

Completed

August 2012

Décor Roof Gives Cowles Hall a Fresh “Old” Look

When you are close to 160 years old, it is inevitable that you are going to need some parts replaced. That was certainly true for Cowles Hall at Elmira College in Elmira, New York. Cowles Hall was the very first building constructed at Elmira College, and when built in 1855 it functioned as dormitory, dining hall and classroom. It was designed to have an octagonal center 75 feet in diameter, and four wings or “arms” in the shape of the Greek Cross. (Only three of these wings were built.) The building is featured on the college seal and in the National Register of Historic Places.

An all-encompassing renovation of the Hall began in 2010 and featured major structural work as well as a new roof. “The original building had a masonry exterior with wood timbers on the inside,” explained Don Brimmer, director of facilities at Elmira College. “During the renovation a steel superstructure was put in place to support the walls and other mechanicals.” New windows, doors and other facades were also installed.

Deciding which roofing system to use to

replace the old built-up roof on the renovated building was not easy. “Parts of the roof are very visible, and because this is such a historic building the city and community were very concerned about the appearance of the roof,” stated Eugenia Brieva, partner at QPK Design of Syracuse, New York. “A metal roof would provide the historic look we were after, but we were concerned about performance issues with a standing seam metal roof.”

Brieva had used the Décor Roof System on several other historic buildings and thought it was the best solution for Cowles Hall. The Décor system uses the Sarnafil G410 thermoplastic single-ply roofing membrane with Décor profiles to give the appearance of a standing seam metal roof. It is one of the only roofing systems of this type that includes warranty coverage for the hot-air welded ribs.

“The Décor system provided functionality, good waterproofing, hot-air-welded seams, and the appearance we wanted,” Brieva remarked. “It also could handle the different shapes and levels of the roof.”

“We were in full agreement with the architect’s recommendation of the Décor

Sika®

Sarnafil®

system,” said Brimmer. “Anyone in facility management knows that Sika Sarnafil is one of the best names out there.”

A Challenging Installation on Many Levels

Charles F. Evans Company, Inc. of Elmira was selected to be the roofing contractor for the difficult roof replacement. “They were hired because of their ability to provide access, safety and quality,” stated J. D. Young, vice president at Welliver McGuire, Inc. of Montour Falls, New York, the construction manager of this project. “We had an exceptionally aggressive schedule for the different aspects of the building renovation, and all of this scheduling depended on the installation of the new roof. We knew Charles F. Evans could get the job done.”

The roofing crew started by putting in new metal decking on the tower roofs, belvedere and flat roof areas. Three inches of insulation and the Sarnafil 60 mil G410 membrane in lead gray were then installed on those roof areas. The sloped roofs (3/12 slope) started with metal decking, 1.5 inches of mechanically attached insulation, 1.5 inches of adhered insulation, quarter-inch gypsum board, and the gray Sarnafil membrane. Ribs were then installed 25 inches on center. The mansard roof (21/12 slope) had new metal decking, three inches of insulation, the fully adhered Sarnafil membrane and ribs 25 inches on center.

“One of the biggest challenges we faced was coordinating with the school’s public safety programs,” explained Bob Pringle, vice president of Evans Roofing Company. “Cowles Hall is right in the middle of campus and school was in session so we had to make sure the students and faculty were protected.” Young added, “Their safety practices were excellent — we didn’t have a single incident.”

Another issue was the weather. “We went through four seasons during this project, so we experienced weather such as heavy rains, snow, 85 degree heat and 20 degree cold,” said Mike Eames, project manager at Charles F. Evans.

“Charles F. Evans did a great job keeping the building watertight at all times,” Young stated. “At one point we had a temporary



roof protecting three million dollars worth of mill work while tropical storms and hurricanes to the south of us dumped very heavy rains on us. There were absolutely no problems.”

Perhaps the biggest challenge, however, was dealing with the different shapes and levels of the roof. “This project had high slopes, low slopes, an octagonal cupola and dormers, and a six foot circular radius,” Brieva pointed out.

“We had to be very careful with the spacing of the Décor ribs on the steep dormers on the sides of the building,” Eames said. “We also had to hand weld the ribs in those areas. Fortunately Sika Sarnafil representatives were



available to help us with terminations and technical details.”

“Charles F. Evans stayed on task and on budget — they were a very professional outfit,” Brimmer remarked. “They are top notch in my book.” It was this professionalism and attention to detail that earned Charles F. Evans First Place in Sika Sarnafil’s 2012 Contractor Project of the Year, Steep Slope Category.

A Roof for the Ages

So far Brimmer is “very pleased” with the Décor roof. “It is performing perfectly — we had our first winter since it was installed with no issues or leaks,” he stated. “I’m confident it will deliver many years of service.”

“We are very pleased with the appearance of the roof and have received numerous compliments on it, especially from alumni,” Young said. “I have already recommended the Décor system several times. When aesthetics matter, this system is the top of the list.”

Brieva added, “The Décor system gives very good value to the client in terms of life cycle costs and benefits. You also need a good installer like Charles F. Evans to get the full benefits of the system. It was the right choice for this project and everyone is very happy with it.”

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