

Back to the Drawing Board

Cristo Rey Columbus High School breathes new life into the former Ohio School for the Deaf.

BY EMILY THOMPSON

Although the Ohio School for the Deaf moved to the North Side in 1953, many people still associate the French Chateau-esque building at 400 E. Town St. with the school. But this year, a new school will call the building home.

In February 2013, the Columbus Metropolitan Library bought the site, which is adjacent to the main library, from Pennsylvania-based Campus Apartments for \$2.16 million. The library then sold the building and a portion of the property to Cristo Rey Columbus High School for \$1 million and kept a strip of parking lot connecting the library to Topiary Park.

Cristo Rey, a college-prep school that provides students with real-world work experience through a work-study program, has been renovating the 5-story building since last summer in preparation for its move from a temporary Franklinton site.

The first three stories were renovated in time for the start of school, and the remaining two should be complete by Thanksgiving. "Part of the beauty of the renovation is we're repurposing the building for its original use: a school," says Cristo Rey president Jim Foley. cristoreycolumbus.org

Starting fresh Campus Apartments bought the site with plans to convert it into condominiums, but the plan fell through and the building sat vacant for about nine years, Foley says. So when Cristo Rey hired architecture firm Schooley Caldwell Associates and general contractor Corna Kokosing and started the \$18 million renovation, they first had to address asbestos and mold, replace the roof and windows and install new HVAC and plumbing systems. "It was in pretty bad shape," Foley says. "It was structurally sound, but there was a host of issues we needed to deal with."

Restoring history Before Campus Apartments owned the building, which was built in 1899 and is on the National Register of Historic Places, it had been chopped up into small rooms with drop ceilings to house offices. "There wasn't a curve in the building—it was all right angles," he says. They removed the drop ceilings, uncovered arched doorways and restored the larger rooms.

Incorporating technology All four entrances are locked from the outside (faculty mem-

bers have keycard access), and workers installed a security window at the main entrance. Inside, all classrooms have motion-sensor lights, Wi-Fi and built-in projectors that connect to students' tablets and display their work on whiteboards. "Every whiteboard becomes a smart board," he says.

Looking forward Cristo Rey's new main entrance opens to a walkway into Topiary Park; the renovation called for opening the fence and installing pillars that match those at the other park entrances. When CML begins renovating the main library early next year (they hope to finish by August 2016), part of the plan is to build a back entrance and turn the library's remaining portion of the Deaf School property into green space. "Our inspiration is Bryant Park in New York, which is connected to The New York Public Library," says Nate Oliver, CML public services director. "The back of the library goes right against the park, so it creates this connection from the library to the park."

RENDERING: COURTESY CRISTO REY COLUMBUS HIGH SCHOOL

