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## Building a Better Lunch

ESPN's in-house facilities team crowd-sourced suggestions from employees to expand and upgrade the cramped cafeteria at the media company's Connecticut HQ

By Matt Alderton

ESPN knows athletes. And, if there's one thing all athletes can agree on, it's that food is fuel. Olympic diver Tom Daley, for example, attributes his perfect form to a protein-packed breakfast of beans on toast. Baseball Hall of Famer Wade Boggs used to eat a whole chicken before every game. New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady consumes mostly raw foods. And, New York Yankees third baseman Alex Rodriguez starts every morning with a breakfast of six egg whites, oatmeal, and a glass of Vita Coco.



Of course, athletes aren't the only ones in sports who need fuel to do their jobs. So do television producers, marketers, copywriters, cameramen, graphic designers, and accountants—which is precisely why ESPN put a bigger, better cafeteria at the top of its construction "wish list" in 2013, and why, later that year, it began designing an expansion of ESPN Café, the on-site cafeteria serving employees who work at the media company's 136-acre corporate campus in Bristol, Connecticut.

"We are always on the air, so we have people here doing their jobs 24-7," says Rick Abbott, ESPN's vice president of global security and facilities operations. "Taking care of those people, keeping them fed, and giving them a place to go where they can take a break is a really key component of our success."

have 4,000 people who work in Bristol, and the original ESPN Café was built for about 1,400 people," Abbott says. "So, we had outgrown it pretty significantly."

Because minimizing disruptions to employee dining was a major priority, executive sponsors knew early on that they wanted to expand the existing facility rather than replace it. Details of the expansion, however, fell largely to a committee of the cafeteria's principal users.



"When we determined it was time to expand the cafeteria operation, we reached out to several segments within ESPN who we identified as the core users of the dining facility: personnel in the technology group, the television production and operations groups, the administration group, and what we call the 'content group'-or, the folks responsible for developing programming," says John Cistulli, ESPN's senior director of global

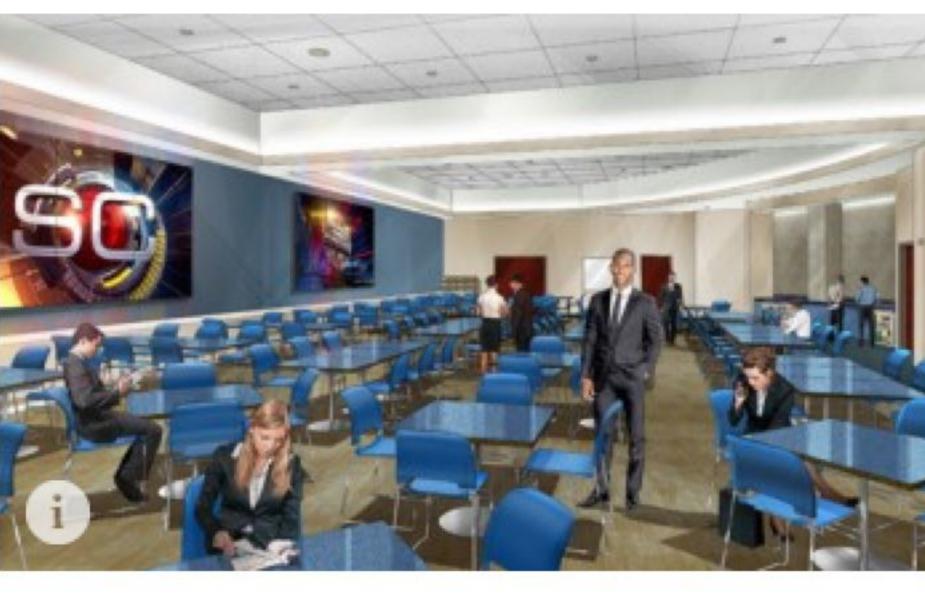
"We went to those five groups and assembled a group of stakeholders to filter all the ideas that came in from various levels of employee engagement to make sure the best ones made it into the final design."

and FLIK International, ESPN's food-service partner. They all collaborated on design elements that would improve the logistics of preparing and serving food to ESPN's workforce.

"At the end of an almost yearlong period, we had identified what were the core needs of both the kitchen operations and the company," Cistulli says, adding that his team identified several needs that informed the cafeteria's final design, including meeting space, semiprivate dining areas, and additional workspaces for kitchen prep.

Construction of the cafeteria commenced in June 2014 and, as of press time, was scheduled to wrap in July 2015. The finished facility will be nearly double the size—42,310 square feet, up from 21,967—of its predecessor, with a 200-person conference room, an employee learning center managed by the HR department, a state-of-the-art kitchen, new loading docks, an on-site Starbucks, and an enlarged servery with a deli, a dessert bar, and numerous specialty dining stations—including ones that serve brick-oven pizza, healthy fare, and international cuisine.

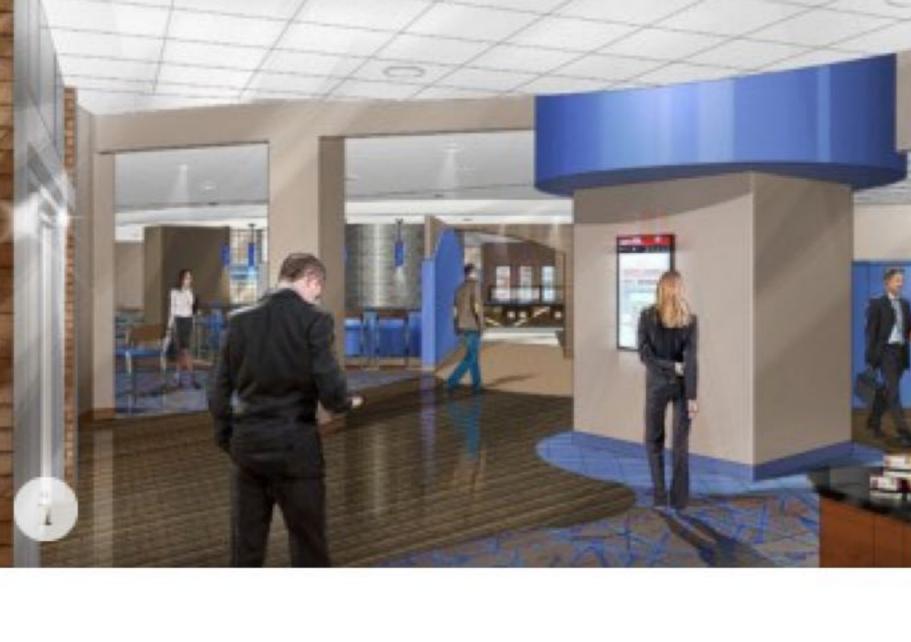
be its two dining areas. The first is a



ESPN's brand and values will pervade the dining areas. One space, for instance, will be devoted to college football and feature a collection of artifacts related to the sport. Another will showcase artwork from employees' children, created nearby at ESPN's on-campus child-care center. A third space will honor ESPN's work in the local community, and a fourth will honor employees who are veterans of the US and foreign militaries.

"We like to celebrate the accomplishments of our employees around campus and the different things that make ESPN such a fun place to work," Abbott says. "When you walk into one of our buildings, it's not like walking into an office building. You can tell immediately that you're walking into a space that houses highly creative media people. You feel invigorated because you're surrounded by sports, creativity, and success."

In the case of the new ESPN Café, the feeling of being "surrounded by success" isn't just figurative; it's literal, because the project team faced—and solved—numerous challenges during design and construction. One, for instance, involved unstable ground, which necessitated a foundation consisting of drilled piles and grade beams instead of conventional footings and foundation walls. Another challenge was integrating the facility with its surroundings, but Abbott's team made it work by combining traditional masonry and contemporary glazing to simultaneously match the old and new structural siding of different nearby buildings.



Perhaps the greatest difficulty, though, was the project's schedule. "We decided early on that we didn't want to have the cafeteria closed for more than two consecutive winters because we didn't want employees to get so accustomed to going off-site or using temporary facilities that they'd lose interest in the new cafeteria," Cistulli says. "So, we decided to limit our construction to about 16 months. We knew that was a compressed schedule, but we made it work by doing a lot of up-front engineering to make sure we selected

systems and construction techniques that could be completed on time."

The end result is as much an operational success as it is a construction feat. "The cafeteria, in my mind, is the one building we've built that every single person on campus will use," Abbott says. "It's the hub of our entire operation."

## ESPN's Digital Center 2

The new ESPN Café will fuel ESPN's employees, but the task of powering its broadcasts falls to another new building recently completed by the company's facilities team: the 193,000-square-foot Digital Center 2, which has five television studios where ESPN produces its most popular programs, including SportsCenter and Sunday NFL Countdown. According to vice president of global security and facilities Rick Abbott, the LEED-certified building was designed to facilitate 24-7 HD broadcasting through six million feet of fiber-optic cable, dozens of video and graphic-display monitors, cutting-edge touch screen technology, and LED multidimensional monitors. Abbott calls the building a "great collaboration" between ESPN's construction and engineering, technology, and creative-services groups.

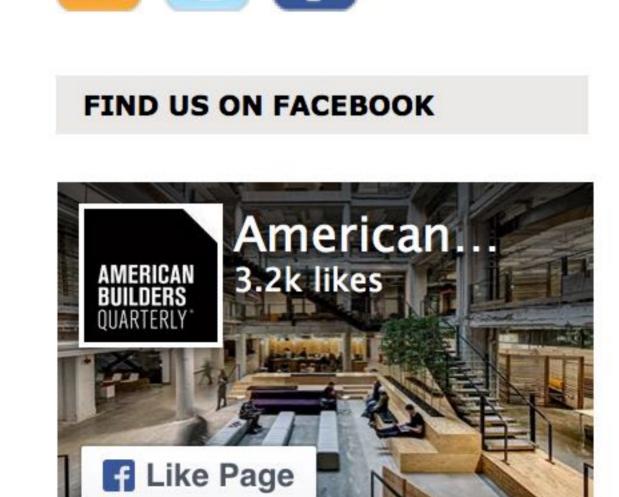


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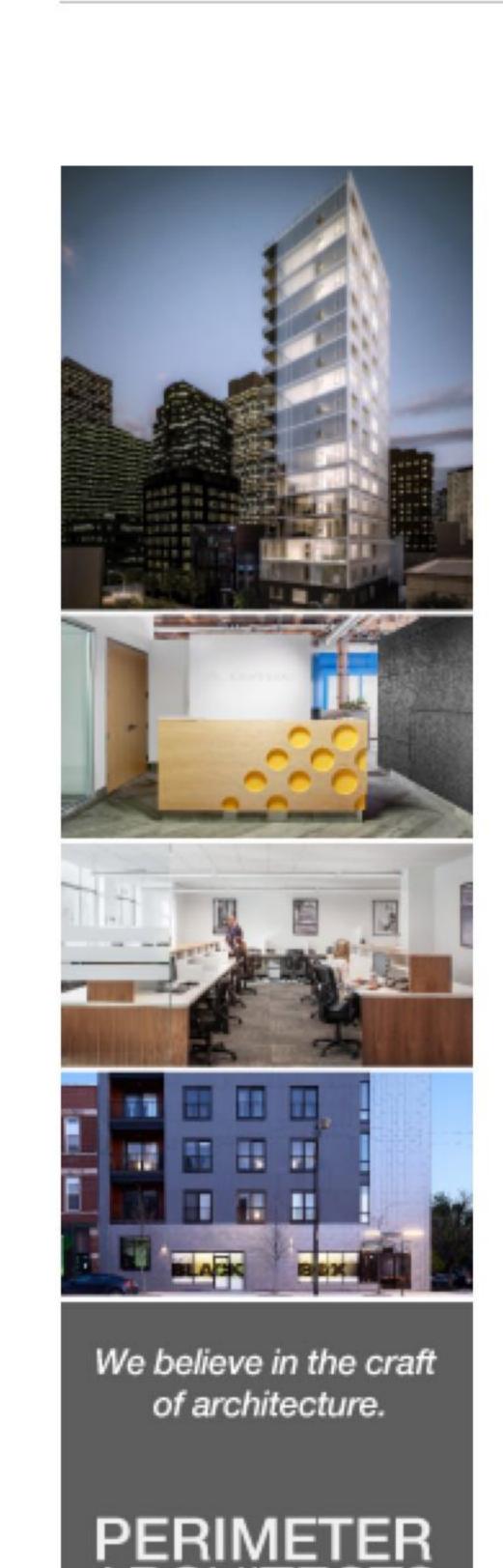




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Built in 2000, the existing ESPN Café was neither a relaxing getaway nor a convenient place to eat. "We

construction and facilities engineering.

Also involved intimately in the design process were the facility-operations team, a kitchen consultant,

For patrons, the facility's highlights will

boisterous social space with a sports bar atmosphere, complete with a glut of televisions broadcasting live sports. The second is the opposite: quiet and sophisticated, with sitting areas and computer portals where employees can have impromptu meetings or working lunches. "The first area is more open, lively, and dynamic, like our company is," Cistulli says. "The second is more elegant."

