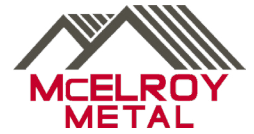


CASE STUDY:

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-CLEAR LAKE



Since 1974, the University of Houston–Clear Lake ([UHCL](#)) has been offering excellence in education in Clear Lake, Pearland, and the Texas Medical Center. The university's beautiful and safe campus is nestled upon 524 acres of natural green space and boasts a yearly enrollment of nearly 10,000 students.



PROJECT SPECS

PROJECT NAME: University of Houston Recreation & Wellness Facility

PHYSICAL LOCATION: University of Houston–Clear Lake

MCELROY SYSTEM UTILIZED: 22 Gauge Sheet Metal

SELECTED COLOR: Sherwin-Williams Fluoropon PVDF Custom Color Aged Bronze

SQUARE FEET ON PROJECT: 81,000

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: SmithGroup, Dallas, TX

INSTALLER: MCT Sheet Metal, Katy, TX

THE PROJECT

Growth and expansion have defined the ongoing evolution of UHCL in recent years, which has helped transform it from a commuter school for continuing education into a four-year campus with resident students. This growth necessitated the need for a new recreation and wellness facility, envisioned to become the campus landmark.

“Campus recreation and wellness centers are powerful tools for recruitment and retention of higher education students,” says Mark Kranz, FAIA, Vice President & Design Director at SmithGroup of Dallas, the engineering firm tasked with the conceptualization of the facility. “To that end, the university wanted a bold, modern new facility to elevate its brand externally, and unite the campus internally with a strong, cohesive identity.”

THE CHALLENGE

UHCL didn't want just another building, they wanted a facility that would turn heads and represent their forward-thinking nature. The university described their ideal facility as one that would “provocatively reflect the program within [and its] overarching sustainable strategies ... [using] material and color to epitomize the UHCL ‘Hawk’ brand.”

SmithGroup knew that to bring this vision to life, they'd need to employ “glazing,” bringing a glass component to the building's facade. Kranz says a major challenge with glazing is the control of solar heat gain and visual glare as it relates to energy performance and environmental comfort. To bring it all together, he knew metal components would be necessary throughout the project to help achieve the design's solar control strategy.

“On the exterior, dramatic overhangs, metal shade structures, and metal fins would reduce heat gain.” He continued, “While on the interior, perforated metal guardrails would diffuse sunlight to reduce glare.”



THE SOLUTION

To achieve the desired look, SmithGroup turned to MCT Sheet Metal, contractors who trust the McElroy Metal brand. Using McElroy Metal products, MCT Sheet Metal handled the fabrication and installation of metal products in the new center.

“[McElroy Metal] has a fantastic warranty with a large selection of color options to meet the design needs of the architect,” says MCT owner Patrick Coussens.

He noted that: “The 22 gauge sheet metal used is a step above the 24 gauge typical standard, which translates to a more robust panel in terms of strength and wind load. That adds longevity to the project. The profiles SmithGroup designed are fantastic for breaking up the façades into something visually enjoyable.”

Kranz agrees. “Working creatively with a simple metal coil and breaking it into three custom profiles, we were able to express the project’s kinetic spirit and purpose. It isn’t easy to capture movement with static materials, but the panel composition makes the architecture move, in a very provocative way.”

To drive home this point, Kranz references the south façade of the building:

“It’s energized with a dynamic composition of custom profile single-skin metal panels, inspired by the motion of a hawk in flight... That wing of the building houses research and academic space for the Health and Human Performance (Kinesiology) programs... We thought of both the body in motion and the flight of a hawk and overlaid the two as an abstract way to think about how a façade could appear to be kinetic.”

THE RESULTS

Today, the 81,000 square foot Clear Lake Recreation and Wellness Center is a key recruiting tool for the university, partnering student life with wellness-focused academics and becoming home to the university’s Exercise and Health Science Department. It houses recreational amenities including fitness/exercise facilities, an indoor track, and multi-use athletic courts for club sports, intramurals, and personal training.

The new facility has been met with enthusiasm from the faculty, staff, students, and alumni. Of course, getting there was a team effort. “A dynamic set of ideas led to exploration and experimentation with broken metal profiles,” says Kranz. “The result is very poetic and elegant and uses a simple and economical material.”



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