



# Game-changing Architecture

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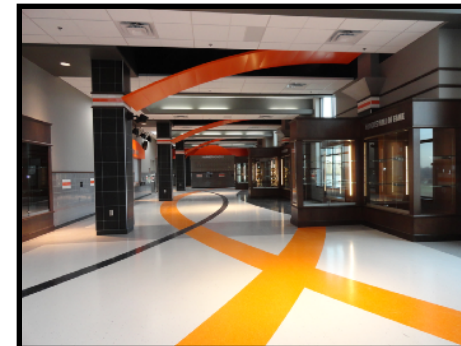


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# Leadership through the construction process

School executives reveal all the ways hiring outside architects improves, safeguards building efforts

As questions rose over a planned Kellyville (OK) Public Schools basketball arena, local officials sought answers from executives with Sparks Reed Architecture and Interiors. Longtime Kellyville board member John Tuttle said the architects listened carefully and politely at each gathering, putting some of the public's construction inquiries to rest within moments. Those questions they couldn't immediately answer drew quick research and results, which helped win the trust of staff, parents, and voters.

That parallels experiences many athletic directors, school administrators, and other officials shared from similar efforts. It marks just one reason why these executives recommend hiring an architectural firm as early as possible in any renovation or construction project. By outlining the best and safest long-term paths to a successful, cost-efficient operation, the advice and guidance of outside architects may save schools time and money through the decision-making process.

"An architect is vital in that role," said Tuttle, a former president of the National School Boards Association. "A teacher isn't a designer, and neither is a superintendent, however much they like to think they are. Not even someone who's in construction, like me, is a designer. I'm thinking about details in the building process and not about how we should set up each classroom.

"That's where you rely on that architect and that design group," said Tuttle, president of Kellyville's board. "They have the expertise to lead the people who know what they want to happen in that proposed room but don't know the best way to make that happen. The architect's job is to guide them through the process, to help them understand."

This recommendation recognizes the increased sophistication and internal resources high schools, colleges, and universities now command. Hiring an outside consultant provides clear, unbiased views that often weigh things insiders may overlook or take for granted. The outsider helps keep projects on track.

"There's always a budget and there's always X number of dollars you can spend on a structure," said Robert Sprague, a former athletic director for Tulsa Memorial High School who worked with Sparks Reed to develop and build Memorial's Veterans Arena. "The architect is excellent at keeping you on that budget."

## Unforeseen options

Many school officials and supporters admittedly have a better grasp of these issues today than they did a generation ago. Where once many boards and voters had to be carefully led through the decision-making process, most schools now have one or more standing committees to regularly evaluate building maintenance needs, efficiencies, and funding resources. Even small school districts often employ long-range master plans to direct growth needs, while many colleges and universities draw on internal architectural arms to oversee such projects.

## State of the Art

Sapulpa (OK) Public Schools completed a dramatic renovation of its George F. Collins Stadium in 2016. The design by Sparks Reed Architecture and Interiors improved the stadium entrance, replaced its bathrooms, and gave the facility a new concession stand and vendor booths. Above all that, the Sparks Reed design added a new press room, coaches boxes, and a hospitality suite. These changes lifted the stadium's spectator capacity to 4,309. "It is awesome," Sapulpa High School Athletic Director Jason Parker said of the renovation.



But with all those resources, nearly all these organizations still hire outside architectural firms at their earliest opportunity. They need them for:

- Learning the latest trends in work and traffic flow, occupant safety, cost evaluations, infrastructure efficiency and sustainability, the best available materials, and cutting-edge hardware.
- Guidance on political hurdles facing construction, environmental issues, location evaluations, and the latest in research and development results.

- Leadership on inspiring designs, multipurpose potentials, and ways to generate more revenues from building usage.

- Reassurances that any structure they raise or update will remain vibrant and useful for generations to come.

"We've been very blessed to have architects to help walk us through this process," said Tulsa (OK) Union Public Schools Assistant Superintendent for Support Services Charlie Bushyhead, whose school district handles about 20

construction or renovation projects each year. "Our architects have often brought options forward to us that we had not looked at before."

### "Our most important things"

Architects help construction-minded school officials grasp vital issues right from the beginning, such as:

- Ensuring the safety and success of students, faculty, and visitors within or around the building.

"First and foremost is student safety," Sapulpa High School Athletic Director Jason Parker said of campus construction priorities. "Second to that is outcomes, student outcomes. Whether students can be better served by having more rooms, access to the facility, more equipment. These benefit everyone in the community. Obviously, when you have better education outcomes, you get higher levels of community development."

Bushyhead shared how Tulsa Union's various contractors have guided such discussions concerning a variety of materials and needs, from social issues like traffic patterns and student habits to structural specifics of safe rooms and safety glass.

"Safety and security are our most important things," he said. "But our mission still falls into educating our students and helping them into a better life."

- Performing due diligence on program needs.

"Form has to follow function," said Bushyhead. "You have to ask the question, How does what we're building support what we want to happen?"

Such diligence usually proves an ongoing process, from the project's big-picture conceptualization and bond funding determination to such fluid construction details as where electrical outlets go, what kind of lights to install, communication system needs, or how many stalls each bathroom requires.

"Most users can't visualize that," said Tuttle. "The architect's job is to lead them through the process, to help them understand."

For example, one often-overlooked issue here involves pinpointing the best possible building location for benefitting campus foot traffic, usage, efficiency, parking, visibility, and future growth needs. Sprague said this is a vital first step, especially if the school seeks to build a stand-alone structure like Veterans Arena. Bushyhead noted how determining such paths might spur changes or new usages for other parts of the campus.

"We're not just building a \$12 million facility to last 10 years," said Sprague. "We're looking for at least 50 years, and possibly more. That's where the architects can give the owner some vision and thought into the future, not just the present."

- Stressing sustainability in purpose, function, and materials.

"What products do I select that are going to allow this building to be standing 50 years from now and still functioning?" said Bushyhead. He noted how architects play a vital role in that with his organization, helping Tulsa Union identify efficient, appealing materials that do not stretch the budget yet wear well.

"For example, we're spending a little more money than we first thought on bathroom finishes, floor, and wall tile," he said of a project now under construction. "They're going to stay cleaner a lot longer with less maintenance."

These steps fit the strategy of all school leaders, as enabled by their architects, to get the best bang for their buck.

similar smaller venue in the arena. They rented the hospitality suite for that as well."

- Identifying and achieving the best opportunities for inspiring all who use the building.

"You have the opportunity to send a message to your community, and to everyone who will ever step into your facility, so you want to make that point well," said Parker. "Nobody wants to see a new facility or complex that is inefficient or not ascetically pleasing, or doesn't have amenities that patrons and users have come to enjoy in other facilities."

Schools often feel the need to keep up with competing institutions in everything from scoreboard graphics to easily accessible concession stands, hospitality suites, and bathrooms. But with their ever-tight resources and focus on safety and education, many school executives leave ascetic and amenity issues to what architect imaginations may achieve under existing budgets.

Bushyhead said the grand entryway at Tulsa Union's new Union Collegiate Academy evolved from an architect's inspiration. School officials quickly embraced those flourishes, even though they required some plan changes.

"Walking into a grand building like that, which is designed with a little more expensive and finer finishes, it tells our students, it tells our staff, it tells our faculty, that you're walking into a first-class institution, and our expectations are very high," said Bushyhead.

### "They listened to us"

Balancing all these issues offers ways for architects to distinguish themselves, especially as their ideas spur competing visions from school or community leaders.

"I know that, when we were working with Sparks Reed, they truly involved us, the patron, in the design process," said Sprague. "They listened to us. I have friends in other school districts that said that wasn't the case for them. Their architects came in and said, 'This is what you need,' or 'This is the way it's going to be,' and you had little to do with the input. They did what the architectural firm was comfortable with, as opposed to Sparks Reed, where they let us use our own ideas. They found out basically what we wanted and then helped us to develop that to the finished product, and that was fabulous."

Successfully navigating all these issues throughout the building and bond determination process may help school officials win or maintain voter trust — a vital point towards passing future bond issues. Several executives said hiring a resourceful architectural firm early on helped achieve such long-term goals.

"It all comes down to whether the community is going to support you," said Tuttle. "You rely on your architect... trust that their specs, their design, are all coordinated... so that there are no blow-ups when the general contractor starts construction."

That underscores a central truth in all such efforts.

"Regardless of the project, or how big or expensive it is, the people you are building that project for are viewing this as their number one priority," said Bushyhead. "So you have to look at this from that standpoint."

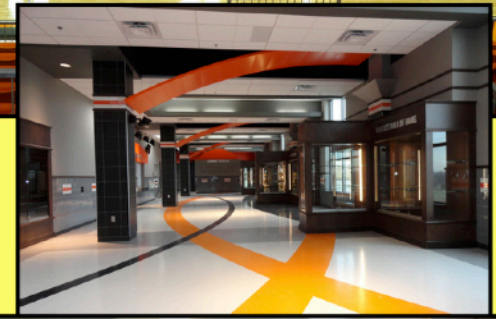
Sprague said Memorial's early architectural hire keyed its success with Veterans Arena.

"It is well-spent money," Sprague said. "It helped us get the most for the amount of public money we could spend, and the very best product."



**Nathan E. Harris Field House, Booker T. Washington High School, Tulsa, OK.** This 56,000-square-foot design by Sparks Reed features a 1,500-seat arena, locker rooms and indoor practice facilities used for more than 10 sports, two sports medicine training rooms, a strength and conditioning room, a Hall of Fame gallery and club house, and hospitality suite.

**Learn more @ [SparksReed.com](http://SparksReed.com)**



"We build nice buildings," said Bushyhead. "I tell people I will never apologize for trying to give our students the very best that I can. We want to make sure that we create an environment that is the best educational environment for our students."

- Maximizing multi-purpose usage.

"Any time you can get multiple issues covered in one facility, you're doing yourself a huge favor," said Parker. "You see a lot of schools get into trouble when you pigeon-hole yourself into one-use facilities."

Identifying multi-purpose opportunities not only benefit more school programs, but helps these programs and the school generate future revenues. For instance, the practice gym included in Memorial's three-year-old Veterans Arena has helped the Tulsa school attract several state tournaments, along with other events.

"Those are just kind of bonuses that you're not thinking of, but that you hope will happen," he said of such construction planning. "I know it's called the auxiliary or practice gym, but our school uses that for all testing purposes. Groups have had banquets in that facility, as they have in a

# Game-changing Architecture

## Athletic Village gives PC West new identity

Putnam City West High School executives foresee wide-ranging benefits from football and baseball stadiums under construction at their west Oklahoma City campus.

“This is going to make us a different high school,” said PC West Head Football Coach Corey Russell. “It will provide us with some identity, something the kids can appreciate and call their own.”

Designed by Sparks Reed Architecture and Interiors, the Putnam City West Athletic Village will raise a 3,500-seat football stadium and a 250-seat baseball stadium alongside the school’s existing softball field. Brick veneer dressed in “Putnam City West Blue” will adorn these steel structures, aligning the complex with existing campus construction designs. A 150+ space parking lot along Eagle Lane will link the three facilities, keeping visitor traffic away from surrounding homes.

“This complex was designed to protect the integrity of the neighborhood while enhancing the Patriots’ game-day experience,” said Sparks Reed co-founder and principal David Reed. “It should fit the high school campus as well as the surrounding neighborhood and not overpower surrounding homes.”

Globe Construction of Oklahoma City hopes to complete the multi-million-dollar project by the end of 2018.

“This is going to give us something all our own,” said Russell. “It’s going to give our school something it has never had: a sense of community.”

The new football stadium accomplishes that by giving PC West its own field. Since that campus opened in 1968, teams from this 8500 NW 23rd St. school have played their “home” football games at nearby Putnam City High School. This new field will change that, providing covered bleachers, a two-story press box, hospitality suite, and other modern amenities in a layout stretching along one sideline, from end zone to end zone.

“I think it’s really, really nice,” said Russell. “It’s going to be different. It’s going to give us something our community has never had.”

Head Baseball Coach Travis Brandenberger foresees similar blessings from PC West’s new baseball stadium. This field will more than double the seating capacity of the Patriots’ former home, with a traditional horseshoe bowl wrapping from first to third base. The two-story facility will provide PC West a press box, coaches boxes, lockers, concession stand, and actual



Rendering of the Putnam City West Athletic Village



dugouts sunken just beneath the playing field — a rare feature at the high school level.

“We should have one of the top 15 baseball stadiums in the state,” said Brandenberger, a 13-year PC West veteran in his sixth year as head coach. “That is going to be a big help with the exposure of our baseball program. It is going to have a big impact on our youth.”

With a new, first-class facility PC West students may call their own, Brandenberger hopes the stadium helps him attract 15 or more new players to his 39-member squad.

Russell has similar depth and skill aspirations for his 40-player football team.

“This will give us something we can start to build on from the ground up,” said Russell, who just completed his first season as coach at PC West. “This is going to give us something we can take pride in.”

These facilities may also generate new program activities and revenue streams. Both coaches expect to foster vibrant, no- or low-cost summer camp programs at the athletic village. Brandenberger foresees the baseball stadium attracting regional competitions.

“I can see us being the host site for several summer tournaments,” he said.

The complex required some careful planning to accommodate existing structures and the surrounding neighborhood, said Reed.

To maximize school district funds, the football stadium utilizes an existing practice field and track on the PC West campus. That choice brought some

interesting challenges, since one sideline abuts a thriving residential area, and the playing surface sits eight feet above Eagle Lane. That required Sparks Reed to plot intricate elevation and landscaping work across the property for drainage control and traffic management. The lighting and press box were kept low to not intrude on residences, and a security fence separates the field from the subdivision. The two-story grandstand stretches along the opposite sideline, divided into three sections to work around an existing building.

“We came up with a design more like a NASCAR track, where the bleachers run from the center point of one end zone to the center point of the other end zone,” said Reed.

“On the first floor we have concessions and restrooms for the stadium, the ticket booth, and locker room for visitors,” he said. “The second floor has a hospitality suite as well as coaches boxes, a box for the announcers, video board operator, and press box. There’s an exterior balcony that oversees the parking lot, so those folks in the hospitality suite and press box can watch the fans arrive.”

In total, the athletic village promises to deliver game and student experiences unique to Putnam City West.

“I think the design was great,” said Brandenberger. “I was hands-on with David Reed, walking around the property. He was very open with the things I requested to have in the field and the changes we needed to have with that facility. I was really pleased with what David did, with his designs. He did a really good job.”

# Putnam City HS expansion unveils hidden treasures

Renovating Putnam City High School's original gymnasium will unveil a piece of history hidden for six decades.

Like many arenas built in the first half of the 20th century, Putnam City's first gymnasium employed huge steel trusses to uphold its roof. Such lofty supports became fan favorites in most venues, ideal for hanging championship banners, fostering compelling shadows, and amplifying crowd cheers into thunderous pathos. But Putnam City's original contractors hid those rafters beneath a second ceiling when that school was finished in 1957, so the massive bowstring trusses never graced the public's eye.

That will change as Flintco renovates and expands Putnam City's original 600-seat gymnasium. Design plans by Sparks Reed Architecture and Interiors will remove the arena's original court and concrete seating, which served just one sideline. Flintco also will remove the original lockers beneath these seats.

The Sparks Reed design replaces these with a new basketball floor within an elevated bowl seating 600 fans.

"We had to rotate the court 90 degrees to allow for that," said Sparks Reed co-founder and principal David Reed.

New locker rooms, ticket booth, hospitality suite, broadcast platforms, and concessions stand promise expanded services in a facility meeting modern accessibility requirements. The lowered court will improve security for players and coaches.

All of these amenities will shine beneath the gymnasium's newly opened roofline.

"That will make it feel like an old-style fieldhouse," said Reed.

This project also includes a 10,000-square-foot addition providing a marquee entrance to not just the arena, but Putnam City's existing auditorium. That new gathering area will give this Warr Acres, OK, high school a safe room for up to 270 people and a new store offering the latest in PC school products

Brick veneer will dress this steel and concrete structure in the school's orange and black color scheme.

"The lobby is designed strictly to replicate the original gymnasium roof structure," Reed said. "I think they're going to be pretty excited about it."

That reflects what thrills Reed most about this year-long construction project, which should wrap by January 2019.

"It was a beautiful structure, and it's never been seen before," he said. "And it's in excellent condition. It is going to be real exciting to see that brought out."



**ABOVE: Rendering of the new entrance to the Putnam City High School gymnasium and auditorium**

**LEFT: Inside the new entrance**

# An artist in the wild

*Gary Sparks explores his passions for photography, landscapes, life*

Many of you know Gary Sparks for the brick-and-mortar landmarks his hand helped raise. But did you know this Sparks Reed co-founder also has left his mark as a photographer? This art shares many bedrock traits with architecture – an appreciation for line, shape, form, texture, pattern, lighting, and color. Empowering that with his passion for life and Western tradition gives you the mix of landscapes and lifestyles visible under the “photography” section of [garysparksarchitect.com](http://garysparksarchitect.com)

In February, Gary achieved a decade-old dream: three days spent photographing the northwest wilderness of Yellowstone National Park. Traveling by snowmobile and bus with a small group of associates, Gary came away with breathtaking images from one of America’s most revered winter wonderlands.

“Our first two days there were cloudy, snowy, so cold,” he recalled with a shiver. “It really gave you a feeling of how harsh that environment is for humans or animals to live in. Then that third day the sun came out and it was really beautiful, the sun on the snow and all that. Just beautiful.”

The group spent each night at a central motel. “We were gone all day, come back, turn our equipment in, go to a restaurant and get something to eat, and then crash to get ready for the next morning,” he said. Covering more than 300 miles with his Canon 5D3 and two lenses, Gary said the trip gave his entourage surprising close-ups of bison, elk, and other forest denizens.

“The most exciting thing, from a nature standpoint, was we got to see a pack of wolves, the same pack, at three different locations,” he said. “The third time we hooked up with them, they were bringing down a bison. We watched that for a long time. Most people don’t get to see anything like that up close. We were probably just a couple hundred yards away.”

That third day completed an experience Gary hopes to repeat.

“If you love beautiful scenery and seeing animals in their real environment as opposed to a zoo or something, if you want to see how animals really survive harsh conditions, then you need to go to Yellowstone in the wintertime,” he said. “It’s something I would recommend to everyone. It’s totally different. It is cold. You dress appropriately. But If I can survive it, anybody can.”



# Setting the Standard of Excellence



The Union Multipurpose Activity Center was designed by Sparks Inc. to accommodate not just Tulsa (OK) Union High School sports program needs, but conventions, trade shows, concerts, and other events. At more

than 150,000 square feet, the 6836 S. Mingo Road facility opened in 2003 with a multi-use arena offering flexible seating for 2,934 to 5,662 spectators. Its 27,480-square-foot arena floor uses a portable hardwood basketball floor. The UMAC also features 1,808 square feet of meeting rooms, the 4,350-square-foot

Redskin Room that overlooks Union Tuttle Stadium, a spirit store, locker and dressing rooms, two ticket stands, six concessions areas, offices, and a wellness/sports medicine center.



**Learn more @ [SparksReed.com](http://SparksReed.com)!**

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