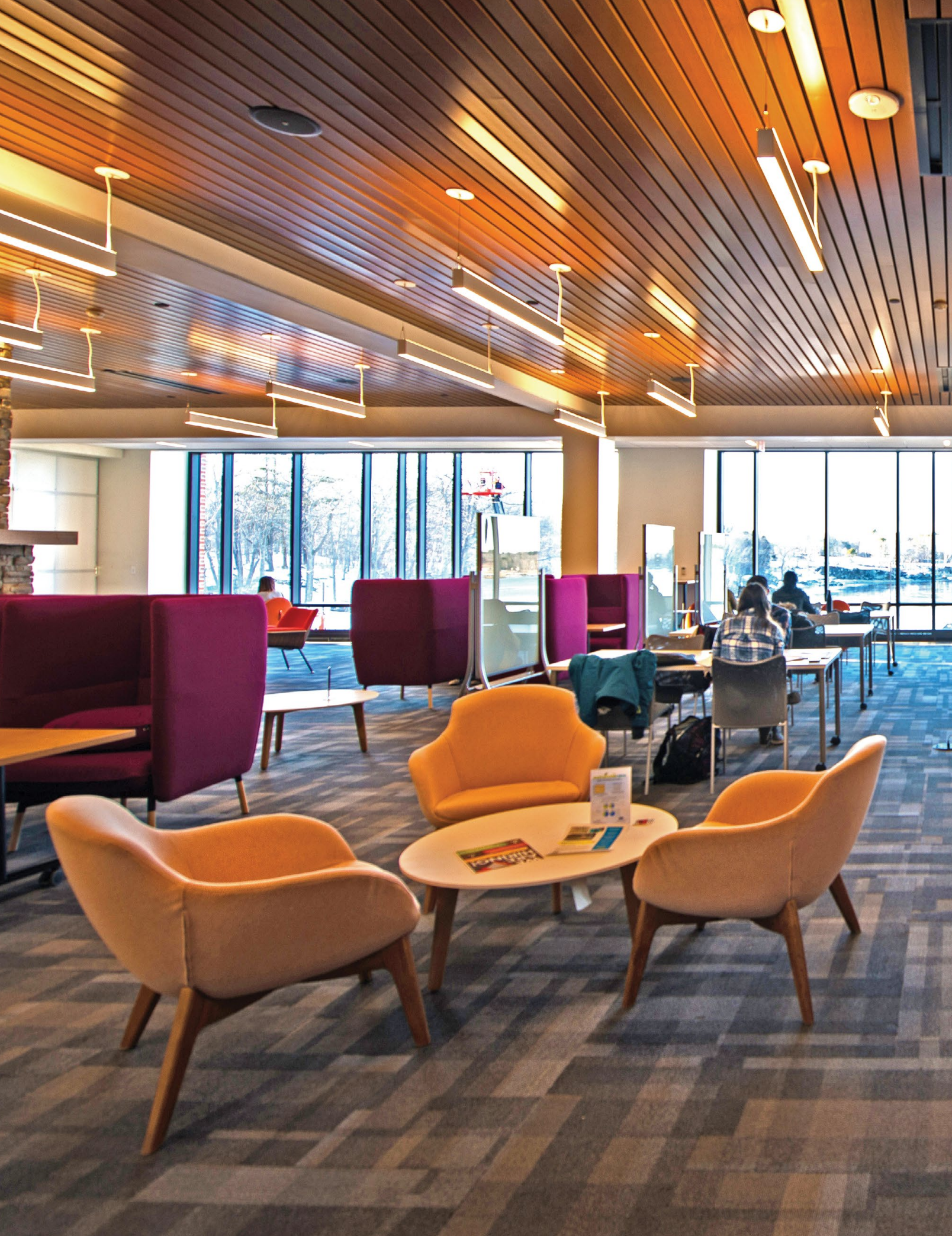

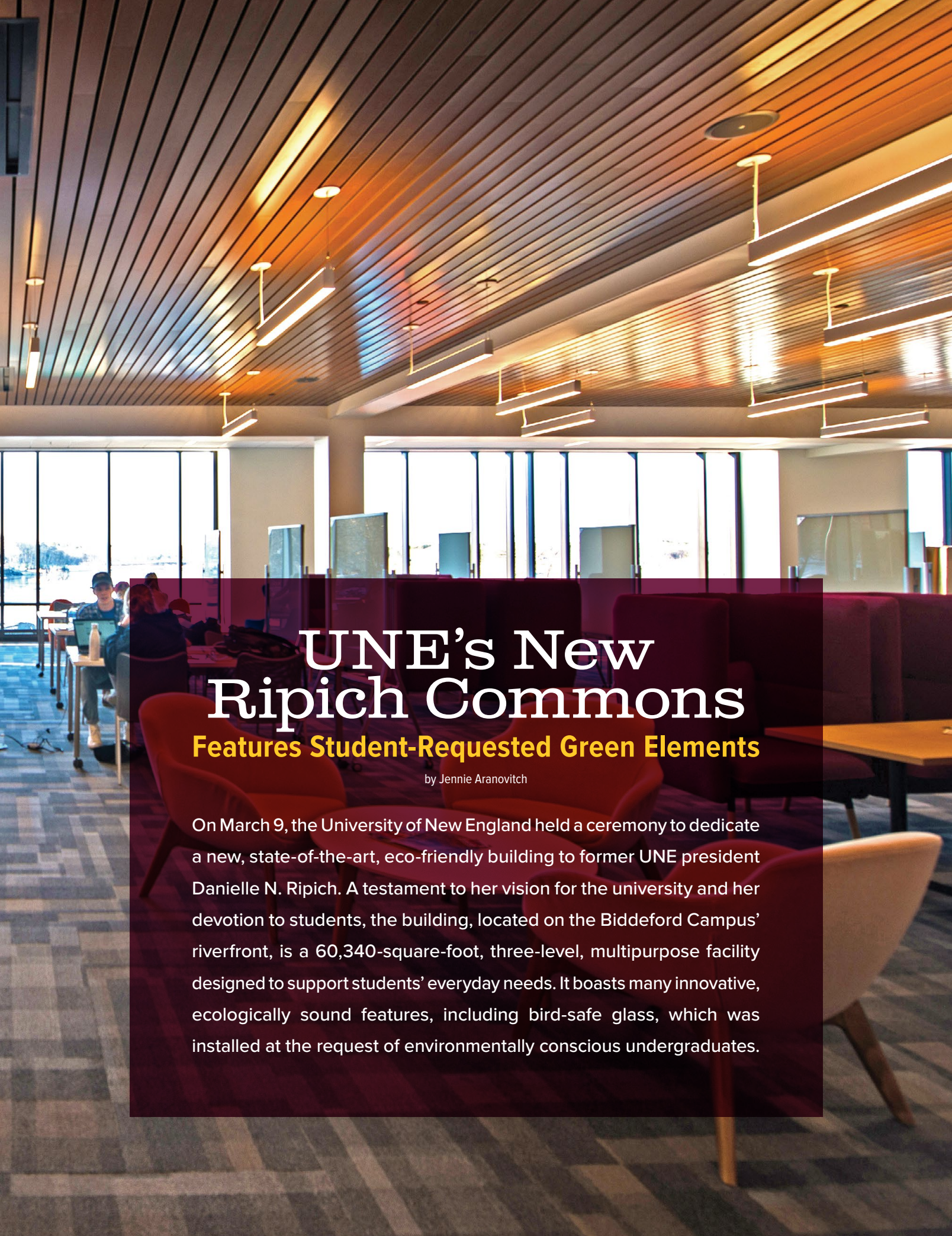

UNE's New Ripich Commons

Features Student-Requested Green Elements

by Jennie Aranovitch

On March 9, the University of New England held a ceremony to dedicate a new, state-of-the-art, eco-friendly building to former UNE president Danielle N. Ripich. A testament to her vision for the university and her devotion to students, the building, located on the Biddeford Campus' riverfront, is a 60,340-square-foot, three-level, multipurpose facility designed to support students' everyday needs. It boasts many innovative, ecologically sound features, including bird-safe glass, which was installed at the request of environmentally conscious undergraduates.

Three Floors Connecting Academics, Socializing, and Dining

The building's first floor provides a lounging and socializing area for students, including a sunken living room, a game room, televisions, an abundance of soft seating, a commuter lounge, and a pub.

The second floor, connected to the university's library via a glass bridge, serves as a one-stop center for all things academic, featuring open study space; several small rooms for group study; tutoring services in the Student Academic Success Center; academic advising; career counseling; an informational video kiosk on study abroad opportunities; computer work stations; a separate lounge exclusively for students in the College of Osteopathic Medicine; and an internship office. The space also provides a Reflection Room for prayer, meditation, and mindfulness.

The third floor houses a new dining hall showcasing a Mongolian grill. All three levels feature fireplaces as well as vast windows on the building's northwestern side that allow for stunning views of the Saco River.

A Testament to a Vision

Ripich expressed her joy that the building named in her honor will provide a tangible benefit to the student body. "Although I've moved on from UNE, I left no small part of my heart and soul here, where I dedicated myself to advancing the university in every possible way," said Ripich at the ceremony. "And now, this gorgeous, gleaming building that you've been so kind as to name after me stands as a visual representation of that effort. It stands to serve the students, who were always my inspiration."

Ripich Commons not only reflects UNE's commitment to the student experience but also demonstrates its dedication to ecological sustainability. Designed in accordance with the highest standards of environmentally-friendly construction, the Commons was built using regionally sourced materials as well as materials with high recycled content.

As the result of efforts by students in Associate Professor Noah Perlut's Introduction to Environmental Studies course, the building will sport solar panels that will provide enough energy to power the campus' electric car charging station.

Other features of sustainability include multiple additions and improvements: a special storm water runoff system to diminish environmental impact; ultra-high efficiency mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems, including an energy recovery unit; fully automated, daylight harvesting lighting system; a living green wall, potentially to be incorporated into UNE's Edible Campus Initiative; and an innovative dishwasher system that reduces water consumption and captures all compostable food scraps.

Staying True to a Vow: Innovation for a Healthier Planet

"We are staying true to UNE's vow to champion 'innovation for a healthier planet.' We proudly embrace our role as environmental stewards, and every aspect of Ripich Commons reflects that commitment," said current UNE president, James Herbert, Ph.D., who succeeded Ripich this past summer. "The building makes as light an environmental footprint as possible."

The structure's crowning glory is its bird-safe glass, covering the entire front façade of the building and both sides of the bridge.

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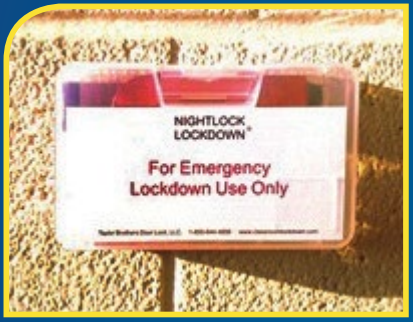

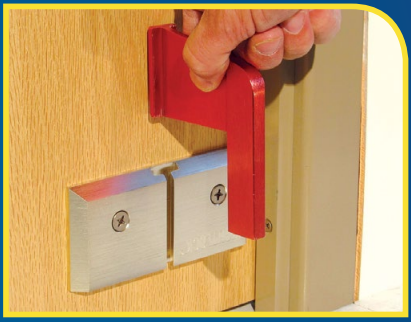

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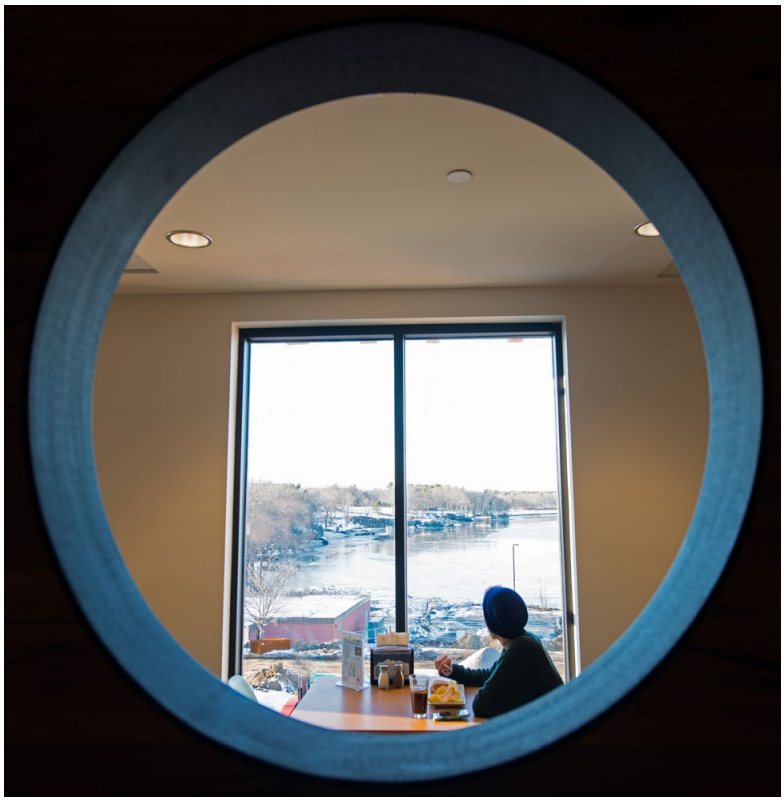

The special glass, which uses technology to break up the reflectivity of glass, thereby alerting birds to its presence, was installed at the request of students who petitioned Ripich for its inclusion.

According to Perlut, students in his fall 2016 Advanced Field Methods in Avian Ecology and Conservation course reacted strongly to a film he showed them on bird conservation and migration, which featured a segment on bird fatalities that result from traditional window glass strikes. As a result, the students lobbied for bird-safe glass to be incorporated into the construction plans for the Commons.

Students Lead the Way in Installing Bird-Safe Glass

Senior Kylie Denny, an Animal Behavior major and Environmental Studies minor, was one of the students who signed the petition for the glass. "The University of New England campus sits on an extremely productive estuary that is home to many avian species, and it's a key stopover point for migratory birds that are fueling up for long-distance, nonstop flights over the ocean to get to their wintering grounds," she explained.

Ripich Commons sits in the middle of this important migratory flyway, which is why, Denny noted, it was so imperative that bird-safe glass be utilized. "The bird-safe glass is a key feature of the new building because the side of the building that faces the water is mostly glass, and traditional glass is deadly to birds because they do not have the ability to see it," she stated.

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Denny said that she is pleased with the success of the petition not only because "thousands of birds will be saved from the fate of flying into the glass" but also because it demonstrated that UNE takes students' opinions and perspectives seriously. "This situation gives students hope that we are able to have a voice in matters that are important to us," she said. "I hope this serves as an example for future students to take a stance and create change."

An Icon That Harkens to Historic Symbolism

One of the most notable visual features of the building is its tower, designed to be reminiscent of a lighthouse, an icon incorporated into UNE's university seal that harkens to the historic symbolism of St. Francis College—one of UNE's founding institutions. Within the tower is a replica Fresnel lens—the type used in lighthouses for centuries to maximize the distance their signals would carry. The fabricated Fresnel lens was made possible through a generous donation from Arthur P. Girard and his family and was dedicated in honor of Ripich for "lighting the way to a bright future for UNE."

Herbert believes that the lighthouse tower as well as the building itself, are, indeed emblematic of hope and knowledge while paying tribute to UNE's unique oceanside campus. "Ripich Commons stands at the water's edge, projecting a clear image of all those things that are best about UNE," he said. "The light in the tower offers a nod to our coastal location while symbolizing the light of knowledge that we hope to bring into our students' lives and the lives of those they touch with the work they do."

Relishing Outdoor Amenities Among Eco-Friendly Buildings

Work will begin in the spring to add outdoor patios, a fire pit and extensive landscaping to the building's grounds. In the meantime, undergraduate, graduate, residential and commuter students, alike, have been excited to make use of their new commons.

In addition to relishing the many amenities it offers, the students are also appreciative of the building's eco-friendly components. "I think many students are able to enjoy it even more with the knowledge that the building is not harmful to migrating birds," said Denny.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Jennie Aranovitch is the writer and editor in the University of New England's Office of Communications. She writes news and feature stories about UNE and serves as the copyeditor and contributing writer for the *UNE Magazine*.