Centergy parking deck collapses, no injuries

By Zuimu Yang
Staff Writer

On June 29 a Midtown Atlanta parking deck at the corner of Spring Street and Fifth Street collapsed around 12:30 pm. The 1,415-space garage mainly served employees of the Centergy building, EBC Bank, Georgia Tech and patrons of the nearby L.A Fitness Center.

Roughly 700 vehicles were removed from the deck and 45 were rendered unusable as a result of the four-story "pancake-style" collapse. No injuries were reported as a result of the collapse.

Hardin Construction was the general contractor for the Centergy parking deck, which was completed in 2004. However, Metromont Corporation was the subcontractor which did the actual construction work. The building was fabricated from precast concrete pieces manufactured at Metromont's facilities in Greenville, SC and Hiram, GA. The parking deck has not been inspected since receiving its certificate of occupancy upon completion, and there had been no complaints since. Consequently, city officials did not feel the need to conduct what would have been a costly inspection.

"Obviously, we're very concerned about what took place and we're trying to figure out what could've happened," said Bill Pinto, president of Hardin Construction. "Nobody should be concerned about a parking deck anywhere on campus; plane crashes and all of a sudden you say, well, I can't go on that plane anymore – that's not the case."

However, according to OSHA's report on this accident, Hardin Construction and two other companies had placed support towers too far apart and had not properly inspected the structure.

"It's unfortunate that a connection between the two incidents continues to get made. They're absolutely and totally different situations," Pinto said.

Typically, structures such as bridges and parking garages are "over-designed" to handle any excessive stress.

In the design phase, we try to allow for some tolerances. We design for a stronger structure than it ought to be," said Robert Leon, a professor of civil engineering at Tech.

One striking aspect of the Centergy parking deck collapse is that such collapses normally occur during two phases: during or soon after construction, or when the structure has aged so much that it is failing part. The Centergy deck, however, has been in operation for only five years.

George Thompson, former professional dancer and general manager of the American Conservatory Theater, has been named as the new director of the Ferst Center for the Arts.

He steps into the position more than a year after former director Jay Constantz left Tech. Stephanie Lee, marketing director of the Ferst Center, served as interim director until Thompson was appointed last month.

As manager of the American Conservatory Theater, Thompson was responsible for organizing the production and operation of 14 shows per year. At the Ferst Center, he will be in charge of not only organizing each season's performances but also administrative departments such as marketing, box office, education and development.

"Early in my career, I worked at the State University of New York. That gave me a very student-centric perspective on managing a campus arts program. So coming to Tech is like a homecoming experience for me," Thompson said.

Thompson has over two decades of experience in managing arts organizations. One of his most significant accomplishments was increasing the budget of the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center's touring budget from $7 million to $27 million while serving as executive vice president there.

"We had three very strong finalists, but George stood out because of his background and interviewing ability. He is really the best person to take the Ferst Center to its next level," said Bill Schaffer, Vice President of Student Affairs, who chaired the search committee for a new director.

According to Schaffer, after the former director left, a company called the Management Consultants for the Arts Inc. worked with Tech to develop a comprehensive report on what the future direction of the Ferst Center should be. One of the recommendations was that the Center needed to deepen its connections with the academic side of the campus.

"I think there are many connections that we can draw between the arts and engineering. Dance and architecture, for example, use a lot of the same nomenclature. Trying to find those connections while bringing world-class art to the campus is a main part of what I want to do," Thompson said.

Traditionally, the Ferst Center has been funded through state funding, revenue from performances, and fundraising. In light of the decreasing state budget, Thompson says that a main priority for the Ferst Center will be making sure that all the performances can pay for themselves and that further efforts to increase attendance, both from within and outside of the campus community, are undertaken.

"The Ferst Center cannot and should not be just another presenter in a vast array of presenters around the country. We need to brand our programming so that it's distinctive," Thompson said.

Another main focus of Thompson's is getting students more involved in the performing arts. When students come to a university, they are pulled in so many different directions. I would just like to expose the arts to them, maybe bring in an outdoor performance or simply ask students for their opinions. But I am heartened by the large number of our students who do come to all of our performances," Thompson said.
On June 29, a Tech student was walking by himself on Mecaslin Street between 15th and 16th Street when he was robbed at gunpoint. According to his report, a large black SUV pulled up to him as he was heading northbound towards 16th Street. Three black males jumped out of the vehicle and pointed handguns at him. One of the suspects was wearing a white shirt while the others were wearing dark clothing. The student was forced to give up his backpack and cell phone after one of the attackers ordered him to surrender his wallet and struck him on the head with the handgun. After taking the student’s possessions, the suspects told him to run away, upon which he did so and alarmed the police. Even though the victim was slightly injured during the incident, he refused medical treatment and was released. Neither Atlanta police nor Tech police were able to locate the suspects.

Student robbed...again

On June 26 at around noon, officers received a report that a person was walking around the road on North Avenue at Williams Street, soliciting rides and business. The person was arrested for soliciting drivers in a public setting and was released to the Fulton County Jail. Interestingly, two days afterwards another person was arrested for soliciting passing drivers for rides and business at the same intersection. This time the incident was reported in the evening; the offender was also arrested and transported to the Fulton County Jail.

When high, keep to yourself

On June 29 at approximately 2 a.m., officers arrested a man for public intoxication at the corner of Tenth Street at State Street. The suspect was obviously drunk and was found to be in possession of marijuana and drug-related equipment. Officers ran a check on the offender and subsequently released him to the Fulton County Jail.
Tech helps launch “green” mission

By Vijal Narayan
Senior Staff Writer

Tech has recently been named as a founding partner for Mission Zero, an online community that offers a place to share ideas and ask questions about sustainability issues. The goal of the website is to provide resources for companies interested in taking steps to become zero waste or carbon neutral. Moreover, it is a place for interested participants to learn about sustainability practices and how to implement them. 

This resource was developed by Interface Inc., a local Atlanta company and leading manufacturer in the carpet industry. The idea for Mission Zero was conceived by Ray Anderson, a Tech alumnus and founder of Interface Inc. Anderson is also recognized as a pioneer in the sustainability field and was one of the first company executives who sought to make his company’s zero waste.

“Mission Zero provides a base for companies to put out their goals for the world to see and to become more environmentally sustainable by forming ideas through networking and discussion,” said Mallory Mallory, Student Communications Director for GreenBuzz, an on-campus sustainability resource. 

Mallory said that individuals play a critical role in the project by asking questions and helping the community come up with answers.

The Mission Zero website includes a comprehensive news section that offers information on topics such as agriculture, design and environmental policy. The site also includes a mechanism for groups to take on smaller goals, or “missions,” such as switching to compact fluorescent light bulbs.

In addition, the site includes a social networking component where individuals, as well as members, can participate in group discussions to share ideas and ask specific questions. “The more information and interaction there is on this site, the more global support it will attract, so that more people can join and make positive change happen,” Mallory said.

According to Mallory, Mission Zero was a logical step for Tech after GreenBuzz was developed in early 2008. She said that Tech strengthens its position in the sustainability field by participating in the project. In fact, Tech was the only university invited to be a part of Mission Zero.

“Interface approached Tech because of its research efforts in the field of sustainability and its track record on environmental issues,” said Terry Blum, Professor in the College of Management and an initial point of contact for Mission Zero.

“We are especially excited about the students getting involved. This next generation is critical to maintaining the momentum that has been started,” said Joyce LaVelle, Senior Vice President of Marketing for InterfaceFLOR. “We sought out leaders who will contribute valuable information to the site and be able to recruit their own stakeholders...to build and sustain the community.”

In the early stages of the project, Tech played a mainly advisory role on how to build the community and raise the project’s visibility. According to Mallory, the next step would be attracting faculty, staff and students to get involved in the mission as well as to suggest possible improvements to the website.

Interface Inc. plans to step away from the project once the final version of the site is released. Afterwards, the site will be run by the community alone.

“Anyone anywhere can participate, which is so exciting to us because it is the community, not Interface, who will determine where this will go,” LaVelle said.