

# On common ground

Story by John Beahler  
Photos by Rob Hill

**B**rady Commons has always been a happening place, but even more has been happening there lately. The venerable student activity center in the heart of campus is going through an expansion that will nearly double its size to 222,000 square feet and give students more reason to make it their home away from home on campus.

This December, most of Brady's current operations will move into the newly built three-story addition to the east. Work crews will begin gutting the original building and its later additions as the first step in a total renovation that is scheduled to be completed in summer 2011.

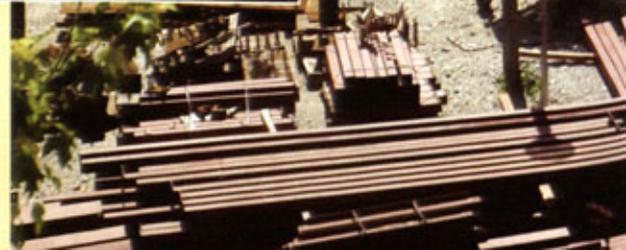
When it was built in 1963, Brady Commons, named for Thomas Brady, longtime history professor and student services dean, provided much-needed space for student organizations to meet. It has also been a place for students to bowl a few frames in the basement lanes, shoot a game of pool, grab a bite to eat, and pick up textbooks or class supplies in the adjoining University Bookstore.

There was plenty of room in Brady back then, when student enrollment was 15,000. Today, Mizzou enrollment is more than 28,000. Brady Commons is bursting at the seams.

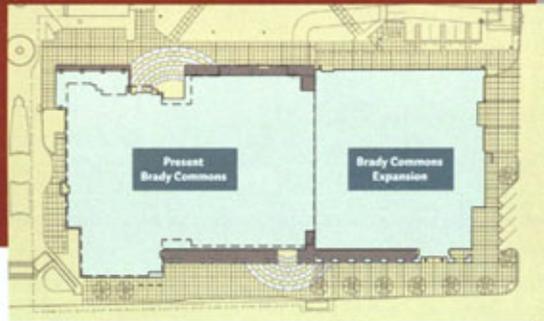
In the run-up to this expansion project, Student Affairs planners commissioned a study to find out exactly how many and how often students use Brady Commons. The results surprised even them. They found that 10,000 students come through Brady every weekday of the academic year. Nearly 5,000 students eat there daily, and 93 percent of MU students say Brady is the campus building they use most frequently.

In a way, Brady Commons became a victim of its own success, says Michelle Froese, MA '89, PhD '96, public relations

MU students use Brady Commons more than any other campus building. The first part of the Brady renovation, a three-story addition, will open in early 2009. It will relieve crowding at the student activity center and include amenities such as lounge areas, inset, where students can relax and socialize between classes.



Brady Commons, the 'family room' of campus, is doubling in size.



manager for Student and Auxiliary Services, which operates Brady Commons, Memorial Union and University Bookstore. As student programs expanded in recent years, they were shoehorned into Brady Commons because of its central campus location.

Take a tour of Brady Commons today and you'll see what she means.

Brady is at the crossroads of student life. One section of the basement is a vast warren of cubicles, home to dozens of student organizations and clubs. Student groups that do not have offices in Brady — there are more than 500 official student organizations at MU — have mailboxes there.

The basement also houses student government offices, the Wellness Resource Center, Greek Life, a student credit union, a snack bar, T.A. Brady's Bowling and Billiards, a video arcade and TV room, the Multicultural Center and the University YMCA. "A lot of those things weren't even on the radar when Brady was built," Froese says.

Except for a place to sleep, students can find everything they need without leaving the building — and program staffers say some students have been known to pull all-nighters there as they rush to get out another issue of the *Maneater* student newspaper or produce programs for the MUTV cable channel.

Students can eat lunch at the Brady Food Court, pick up tickets for concerts at the MSA Box Office, buy books and Mizzou-emblazoned clothing at University Bookstore, shop for computer gear at Tiger Tech, cash a check at the bank, buy stamps at a branch post office, and attend programs at the Women's Center. Brady is teeming with dozens of often-unrelated operations.

"Brady Commons has always had an identity crisis," says Jeff Zeilenga, assistant vice chancellor of student affairs and director of Student and Auxiliary Services. "It is

not thought of as either a student union or a commons, and students feel that we have this void on campus." For more than a decade, he says, student leaders have talked about the need to expand Brady.

In 2000, Zeilenga's staff and student groups began exploring what the next step should be. They conducted focus groups to find out what students wanted to see in an expanded student center and how much they were willing to pay for it. Then architects and engineers drew up plans for a \$57.7 million project.

Half would be paid for with Student Auxiliary Services revenues and half would come from a new \$35-a-semester student fee

on top of the current \$22 fee for Memorial Union and Brady Commons. Students overwhelmingly approved the plan in an April 2005 referendum.

As the project developed, planners wanted to make sure they kept students in mind as they worked out final details. They hired Patty Bloom, a journalism junior from Moline, Ill., as a student representative to help with marketing and to talk with student groups and others about the new student center.

"This is really going to change the face of our campus," Bloom says of the project. "It will be a home where students can be themselves and get their stuff done on campus. There will be a professional atmosphere for student organization offices instead of a basement with moldy ceilings and crammed cubicles. Right now, Brady is so crowded that it is not a place to hang out and spend time with friends."

What did students say they wanted in an expanded student center? "In interviews, students said they wanted more places to sit down and eat, and they said they wanted more hang-out space," Froese says. "If we

want our students to have a rewarding campus experience, one of the things we have to do is give them a place to go and something to do."

The expanded center will have five or six lounge areas with soft seating — sofas and easy chairs — where students can touch down between classes. There will be rooms for small group study and meetings. Plans call for a suite to house student government offices, a 120-seat auditorium and meeting space.

The new Traditions Lounge will have memorabilia from University Archives on display, and Zeilenga's staff will work with the Mizzou Alumni Association to help visitors connect with college memories. "We want to find a way that everyone can find a piece of their Mizzou experience within this building," he says. For instance, areas in the lower level will have displays that honor past student leaders and depict the history of student engagement and social change.

"We want alumni to be able to come back to the new student center and make a connection with their own student experiences," Froese says. "We want alumni to get involved in how the new student center will look. We'd like them to share their anecdotes about Brady Commons and campus life, and we would love to see any photos they would be willing to share."

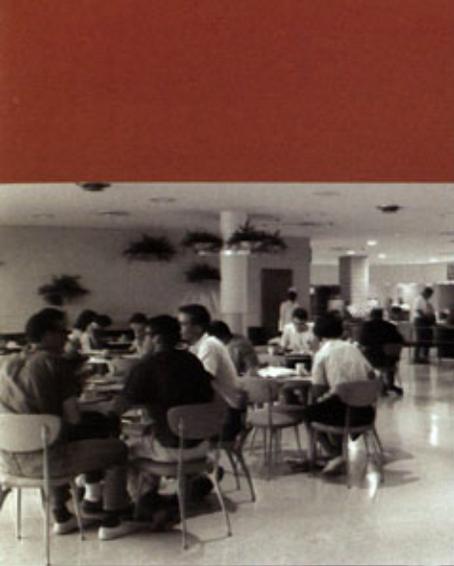
**Clockwise from top left: Brady Commons has always been a favorite spot for students to grab a bite to eat or sip a cup of coffee between classes.**

**Long before in-room cable TV became standard in residence halls, students relied on Brady's bare-bones television lounge for communal viewing of their favorite soaps and sitcoms.**

**When Brady Commons opened in 1963, it offered students another spot to socialize at sock hops and other gatherings.**

**Brady Commons has long been home to the hundreds of student organizations at Mizzou, including the Ham Radio Club.**

The expanded student activity center will present Mizzou traditions in a modern, student-friendly setting.



Photos courtesy of University Archives, C.175.16

**ON THE WEB** > See Brady Commons evolve in historic photos and new renderings.  
[mizzoumagazine.com](http://mizzoumagazine.com)



# Meet you at the Shack, Jack

Food will still be a big part of the student center's offerings. Before the north wing of Memorial Union was built in 1953, Mizzou students made do by using a few favorite restaurants on the edge of campus as hang-out spots. For instance, there was live music and dancing at the Harris Café on south Ninth Street and at Gaebler's Black and Gold Inn on Conley Avenue across from Jesse Hall. But the granddaddy of all student get-together places was the Shack, next to Gaebler's.

It was a ramshackle, down-at-heels hang-out that served sandwiches and beer — lots of beer — and students flocked there from sunrise until long past sunset. Generations of MU students had carved their initials on the wooden booths inside the Shack. According to legend, some booths were so riddled with carvings that they eventually collapsed when people sat down.

Cartoonist Mort Walker, BA '48, was as much an alumnus of the Shack as of Mizzou. Walker convened staff meetings of the old *Missouri Showme* campus humor magazine there when he was editor. He also created Beetle Bailey, his most beloved cartoon character, as a goof-off MU student and Shack habitué.

The Shack burned down on Halloween night 1988, but its memories will live on in MU's new student center. Retired Columbia businessman Joe Franke, the Shack's last owner, rescued a few of the booths and other memorabilia, and they'll have a place of honor in a new lounge that will be called the Shack.

The new Shack will be next to an eatery named Mort's in honor of Walker. He is working on art that will connect the new building with his cartoon creation. Mort's will also serve burgers, sandwiches and chicken tenders — what Michelle Froese, public relations manager for Student and Auxiliary Services,

calls "happy-hour food without the happy." Campus Dining Services staff even worked with MU dietetics students to re-create and tweak the secret "Shack sauce" for burgers from a recipe Franke agreed to share.

Mort's will be one of several free-standing eateries spread throughout the student center's dining area — the goal was to avoid the institutional feel of a mall food court. That and other planning decisions were made after extensive input from students, says Julaine Kiehn, director of Campus Dining Services.

"We surveyed students, faculty and staff as part of our master plan and asked what food offerings would complement the new student center, because there was no point in duplicating what we already offer at other campus locations," Kiehn says.

Students wanted some fast food, such as burgers, fries and chicken sandwiches, she says. They wanted California rolls and other sushi options from Sunshine Sushi, which has been one of the most popular offerings at the current Brady's Food Court and will remain in the new venue. "They said they were interested in barbecue; they were interested in pizza, and what student wouldn't be?" Kiehn says. "They said they wanted quality and variety."

Kiehn and her staff plan to deliver the goods. When the student center opens up again in 2011, dining options will include:

- Pomodoro, an Italian-themed café that serves pizza, calzones and prepared-to-order pastas.
- Kate & Emma's, a gourmet deli with a Southwestern flavor in its sandwiches and wraps.
- Infusion, a coffee shop that will serve ice cream and smoothies; pastries and sweet treats; warm, freshly made doughnuts; and coffee blends roasted in-house.
- DoMundo's, which will feature barbecues of the world, from Eastern Carolina pulled pork to skewers of Brazilian-style churrasco meats spit-roasted over an open flame.

"When we started planning the new



student center," Froese says, "one of the questions we asked was, 'How do you capture long-standing campus tradition in a brand new building?' We don't want any of that history to go away, but we need better facilities for our students."

Which begs another question: In the interest of campus history, will the new Shack continue its namesake's longest-running tradition and serve frosty pitchers of beer? "Believe me, that question has been asked," Froese says, "but the answer is no." ■



Beetle Bailey creator and MU alumnus Mort Walker is the inspiration for the new Mort's eatery that will debut in 2011 in the Brady Commons expansion. Walker is creating original art for the restaurant to celebrate Beetle's persona, an affable student goof-off that Walker created at the Shack, a legendary campus hangout.



MU alumni of a certain age might find their own initials carved on an original wooden booth from the Shack, a long-gone campus watering hole. The booth will have a place of honor in the Shack lounge area at Mizzou's expanded student activity center.

Photo courtesy of Billy Franke and University Archives