The grandeur of the antebellum architecture exhibited by the Strom Thurmond Wellness & Fitness Center, a flagship building on the University of South Carolina campus, led one panelist to describe the facility as “heroic.”

But as impressively and elegantly as the building’s architecture — complete with columns, balconies, portico and rotunda — integrates with the overall campus aesthetic, it is the functional and spatial integrity that makes this large facility successful. Well planned, the Thurmond Center takes advantage of visually interconnected program spaces — spaces that thrive on the skilled control of natural light. A three-story gallery unites the two main floors and mezzanine level, while generous interior and exterior glazing — including eight individual translucent skylights — floods the interior with daylight.

Despite its sheer size and congested surroundings, the Thurmond Center is quite approachable, thanks in large part to two pedestrian bridges, elevated walkways and an urban park designed to provide safe passage for students to and from the adjacent commuter parking lots and housing complexes. The elevated walkways and pedestrian bridges also recall the railway that once existed adjacent to the site.

The Boudreaux Group
COLUMBIA, S.C.
Associated Firm:
Cannon Design
Los Angeles, Calif.
Aquatic Design Engineer:
Rowley International Inc.
Palos Verdes Estates, Calif.
Cost: $38.5 million
Square Feet: 192,000
Funded by: Federal postsecondary education grant, student fees and land sales
Major facility components: Indoor swimming pool, sauna and spa, six racquetball and squash courts, three multipurpose rooms, four-court gymnasium, auxiliary gym with rounded corners and integral goals for indoor soccer and hockey, 1/4-mile running track, 3,000-square-foot cardio deck, 16,000-square-foot strength and conditioning room, 50-foot climbing wall

Judges’ Comments:
“Logical, legible entrances and controlled access points work with the topography and campus circulation.”
— Bill Crockett

“Certainly a classical building.”
— Jack Patton

“The inherent challenges seem to have been met successfully. The building is an appropriate addition to the very traditional campus of South Carolina.”
— Pam Scott