

Building the Ground up at Alerus Center

It began in 1995 as a vision. It was to be a state-of-the-art arena and convention center that would attract visitors from throughout the region to the city of Grand Forks.

But two years later, during the contract document stage for the facility, Grand Forks was hit with a flood that would heavily damage this eastern North Dakota city. The record-level flood would forever change the way the city thinks about the dangers of disaster.

With the massive task of rebuilding underway, city leaders took a second look at the preliminary design of the new 447,000-square-foot events center. There was a potential problem. The main event space originally was intended to be recessed 14 feet into the ground.

Because most of the belowground spaces in Grand Forks had filled with floodwaters, city leaders opted to raise the main event space to ground level in an effort to reduce the impact of any possible flooding.

As a result, the main space can be used in the future as a disaster staging area because of its size, easy ground-level access and safe distance from the river. It is beyond the city's 100-year floodplain area.

The \$71 million project, financed by municipal revenue bonds that will be repaid by retail sales and entertainment taxes, is expected to open in the spring of 2001.

The Alerus features a main arena that will be used for athletic events, concerts and large trade shows, and an adjoining convention center that includes a 25,536-square-foot grand ballroom and 12 meeting rooms.



Artist rendering of the new Alerus Center, scheduled to open February 2001. Courtesy of Schoen Associates.
