

Media contact Greg Lester 215-573-6604 glester@pobox.upenn.edu

University of Pennsylvania Dedicates Skirkanich Hall, an Advanced Bioengineering Facility

October 26, 2006

PHILADELPHIA -- The latest facility on the University of Pennsylvania campus is not just an advanced laboratory space for the growing field of bioengineering, it is a work of art. At a ceremony today on Penn's campus, officials dedicate Skirkanich Hall, the new home to the Department of Bioengineering and the soaring new entrance to the School of Engineering and Applied Science.

Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects designed the building, which was named after Penn alumnus J. Peter Skirkanich and his wife, Geri, who donated \$10 million toward the facility's construction.

"Penn continues to be a leader in bioengineering, both in programs and in facilities," said Eduardo Glandt, dean of Penn's School of Engineering and Applied Science. "Top faculty and top students deserve a world-class building."

Skirkanich Hall will house research laboratories to support bioengineering, a discipline in which experimental and theoretical engineering principles are applied to the understanding of biology and the practice of medicine. The building also features instructional laboratories to provide discovery-based learning opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. These spaces and the Bioengineering Departmental Suite on the third floor are arranged around a sculptural, redundant flight of stairs that provides an easy connection to the research floors. The building is an intricate composition of spaces that unites the surrounding buildings of the engineering school in bold contemporary style.

The husband and wife architect team of Tod Williams and Billie Tsien are known for their attention to materials and details, as exemplified in such works as the Neurosciences Institute in La Jolla, Calif., and the American Folk Art Museum in New York.

Skirkanich Hall's facades consist of brick, cantilevered shingled-glass panes and zinc paneling. Their individual colors follow a distribution centered along a mossy green but with an overall spectrum that ranges from acid yellow to black. Canadian black granite lines the entrance, walkway and the public spaces in the lower floors. The faceted texture of the surfaces has been achieved by a flame treatment of the stone to reveal the glimmer of mica and the opaqueness of feldspar. Steel signage is embedded into water-jet-carved cavities within the granite. Polished granite benches are placed throughout the lower levels and the courtyard.

The structural concrete monolith emerging from the ground can be seen only from inside the building. All vertical concrete surfaces have been bush-hammered inch by inch to reveal the materials blue aggregate and give the concrete the feel of a hand-carved stone, and all concrete floors have been ground to a terrazzo texture, within which the polished blue aggregates simulate gems. Traditional ceiling construction gives way to delicately sandblasted concrete ceilings at the perimeters of the building, flooding the spaces with light.

The overall design leads to a creation that the Philadelphia Inquirers architecture critic, Inga Saffron, called Philadelphia's best new building in years.

More details on the construction of Skirkanich Hall and the donors who made the building possible are available at www.seas.upenn.edu/skirkanich.

###