CHARLES R. DEES, JR. was appointed NJIT’s vice president for university advancement in 2003. He is responsible for the university’s offices of development, communications, alumni relations and special events.

NJIT Magazine: There’s a lot of excitement on campus about the restoration of Eberhardt Hall and its rededication this fall as the university’s alumni center. Why is this project so important to NJIT?

Dees: The renaissance of Eberhardt Hall, with its Victorian grace and charm, was planned as a counterpoint to the sleek, contemporary Campus Center. The juxtaposition of the two buildings makes a strong statement about NJIT’s identity — the pioneering technological university leading the way into the future, but also an institution with a rich history. Eberhardt reminds us that the university had its roots in Newark’s industrial golden age and that technology giants like Edison and Weston had a hand in its establishment.

Eberhardt is also the link that ties our alumni together across many generations. Ask any graduate of the last 50 years what the NJIT campus looked like, and he or she will likely describe “the castle.” Even for those who attended before the university acquired Eberhardt in 1948, the building would have been an unmistakable landmark in the neighborhood. Eberhardt is a visual symbol of the common tradition that the university has imparted to the technological leaders of three centuries.

NJIT Magazine: Eberhardt Hall is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Can you tell us something about the building and its history?

Dees: Eberhardt is a beautiful example of the Gothic architecture of the mid-19th century, built in the Elizabethan style with elements reminiscent of 15th- and 16th-century castles. According to Dave Gibson, the architect leading the restoration project, it’s a rare building — there’s only one other Elizabethan Gothic in New Jersey and a handful on the entire Eastern Seaboard. It was designed by Philip Welch, a founder of the American Institute of Architects and a noted church architect.

Our records tell us that the building was built as the Newark Orphan Asylum. The original structure — now the central tower and north wing — was completed in 1857, with the design allowing for the addition of the south wing, which was constructed in 1874. According to the architectural team, the interior was designed for the comfort and welfare of the children who would live there, as you can
tell by the height of the banister on the grand stair-
case, for instance. The building was state-of-the-art
for 1857, with conveniences such as gaslight, steam
heat and hot-and-cold running water, amenities rare
even in affluent homes of the period. Contemporary
records show that there were also unusual safety
features, including an early fire-extinguishing
system and emergency exits. In many ways, the
building is a monument to the city of Newark and
its tradition of compassionate humanitarianism,
in providing such a gracious and well-equipped
structure for the benefit of orphaned children.

By the middle of the 20th century, the emphasis
in child welfare had shifted to foster care, and in
1948 the university was able to purchase the build-
ing for $58,000. The Board minutes tell us it was
renovated — mainly by painting the entire interior
light green — and renamed Eberhardt Hall.

NJIT Magazine: Who was Eberhardt?
Dees: We know a lot about Fred Eberhardt from a
history of Newark Technical School done during
President Cullimore’s administration. He was, in
many ways, the embodiment of the NJIT spirit. He
was an alumnus, a graduate of one of the very first
classes of Newark Technical School, our predeces-
sor institution. He became president of his family’s
company, Gould & Eberhardt, a Newark-based
manufacturer of gear cutters and shapers, and led
the firm’s growth into a major supplier to the auto
industry, as well as to the military during World
War II. He maintained close ties with his alma mater,
joining the Board of Trustees in 1910 and serving
until his death in 1946. He helped to shape the
development of Newark Technical School and spear-
headed its evolution into a full-fledged, degree-
granting engineering school — our Newark College
of Engineering — by 1919. The Board of Trustees
paid tribute to his many contributions by naming
Eberhardt Hall in his memory. I hope that the
restoration of the building will revive interest in
the man, because Fred Eberhardt is a role model
for students and alumni alike.

NJIT Magazine: What can you tell us about the
restoration project?
Dees: Dave Gibson says that the exterior is being
restored using authentic 19th-century materials —
red brick and brownstone with mortars matched
to those used by the original builders. We’re remov-
ing and repairing 20th-century adaptations such as
holes for air conditioners. The front parking lot is
being replaced with a terraced green and a bluestone
forecourt for outdoor events. Inside, the public areas
on the first floor are being restored, with simulated
gaslight fixtures, Victorian patterned wallpaper, and
carpet and wood trim to recreate the styles of the
late 19th century. The restored area will include the
central lobby, board room, dining room and meeting
facilities. It will be an environment unlike anything
else on campus.

NJIT Magazine: So you believe that the restored
Eberhardt will be an important enhancement to
campus life?
Dees: Most definitely. The other buildings on our
campus are modern and utilitarian, and that’s as it
should be. An institution that focuses on technology
and science should emphasize contemporary style
and functionality. But a university also needs some
space that expresses grace and elegance, an enclave
away from the rapid-fire distractions of 21st-century
life. That’s the role we see for Eberhardt Hall.

Editor’s note: There will be much more about the
restoration of Eberhardt Hall in future issues of
NJIT Magazine.