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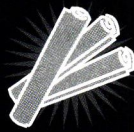
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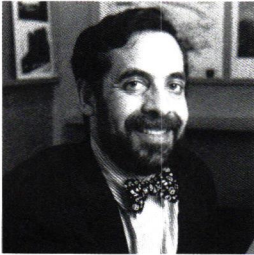
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The Voice(s) of the AIA

By Jonathan Shimm, AIA, President, AIA Pittsburgh



Should the AIA take a position on issues of design quality, particularly for public projects?

Since coming to Pittsburgh more than

11 years ago, it has been exciting for me to see the evolution of this chapter and the role it has taken on bringing advocacy for design and the profession to the public eye. In reflecting on this, I think it is important that we as members understand the mission of AIA Pittsburgh as we move forward, for the role is changing and doors that have been closed to us are now being opened.

AIA Pittsburgh is a poster child for how a chapter successfully advocates for the profession and works to bring awareness of quality design to the forefront. The AIA's motto—'good design is good business'—finally seems to be getting through, although not as quickly as we architects would like, but certainly much more clearly than it has in the past. The AIA has been asked to the table as a part of the River Life Task Force, not only representing the design community, but also to help assure that the selection process is qualifications-based. Similarly, we have been asked to give guidance in the writing of RFPs and have had the opportunity to advertise them to the profession on our web site increasing the opportunities for all firms to participate.

AIA Pittsburgh has taken a leadership role in the design of the new barriers for the Fort Pitt Bridge to preserve the views of the river. We have worked to facilitate conferences on the re-development of downtown and Oakland and to forestall the roadblocks that investors and the institutions face as they try to redefine the economy of the region. We have worked long and hard to develop good relationships with both the city and county governments and they, too, are beginning to appreciate the value that we architects can bring to the region as it continues to evolve.

The question in my mind, as it was recently put to me, is this: Should the AIA take a position on issues of design quality, particularly for public projects? While it might seem that the answer to this question is 'yes', as professionals, I think we would be missing the boat and abdicating our responsibilities by allowing the chapter to do so. We as individuals and architects need to stand up and be counted on design issues that we feel are being overlooked or which will have a detrimental impact on the city or region. However I don't think the chapter should attempt to speak for us as a group when it comes to evaluating the quality of a project. If it were to take such a stand, it would risk its reputation on two critical fronts. It would alienate not only those members who disagree with its position but also the groups and decision makers who now value our input on the process and who seek our counsel regarding a variety of issues.

Has the chapter sold out by not taking a stand? I don't think so. I think the role the chapter should take is to make us aware of the issues as well as the opportunities to express our opinions in whatever venues are made available such as the recent Sustainable Pittsburgh forum on the Mon Fayette Expressway. We cannot merely pay our dues and sit back, expecting AIA Pittsburgh to speak for us on issues of design. We all have opinions that should be heard and by speaking individually, rather than as one, we will speak with a much louder voice on the issues that really matter to each of us.

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On the cover: In collaboration with E.R.A.S.M.E./Études Urbaines, UDA prepared a MasterPlan and Architectural Concept for Génitoy Est, a 2500-unit neighborhood which will complete the ambitious New Town of Bussy St. Georges, France.

AIA Pittsburgh serves 12 Western Pennsylvania counties as the local component of the American Institute of Architects and AIA Pennsylvania. The objective of AIA Pittsburgh is to improve, for society, the quality of the built environment by further raising the standards of architectural education, training and practice; fostering design excellence; and promoting the value of architectural services to the public. AIA membership is open to all registered architects, architectural interns, and a limited number of professionals in supporting fields.

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For information about AIA Pittsburgh, AIA Middle PA and the Northwest PA Chapter, call 1-888-308-9099. Online: www.aiapgh.org email: aiapgh@stargate.net.

A Sense of Place, Redefined

by Tracy Certo

We were like hundreds of others

that day, standing near the leveled site of the World Trade Center, viewing the memorial photos and messages taped to the makeshift fences that surround it. *Our Dad. My husband. My sister and best friend.* The people in the tribute photos were smiling and cheerful for the most part, in stark contrast to those of us who stood in a collective and reverent silence viewing the photos. Beyond the collage of memorials lies Ground Zero. There is little to see of the debris, true, and yet the very absence of anything is startling. It's a gaping wound, kind of like the way you feel looking at it. I thought being there would bring it home; instead it seemed even more impossible to comprehend.



Here in the midst of an outpouring of heartfelt messages from around the world, it's possible to sense a whiff of hope and renewal among the ashes.

My family, five of us, were leaving the area, feeling unbearably sad, when we passed St. Paul's Chapel where people signed a hanging tarp outside. A tour guide announced that one more group would be let in that day. We waited a few minutes and were ushered inside, not even sure why we felt grateful to be there.

St. Paul's, as we discovered, is an historic chapel and an architectural gem best known as the place where George Washington prayed the day of his inauguration. Although the chapel is next door to Ground Zero, amazingly the building suffered only two incidents of damage during the World Trade Center attack: one single crack in an original window pane, and an organ silenced by the clouds of dust and debris that choked its pipes. It is clear this is akin to a miracle in the chapel community, something to cling to in the midst of the calamity.

Here in this cheery church with its soaring white columns, they serve 2000 meals daily—breakfast, lunch and dinner—to the many workers who drop in for respite. ("It's like pick-up sticks out there," our guide tells us. "One false move and it can be trouble.")

On the frosty afternoon when we visited, one worker snoozed in a back pew while others chatted at the food table or sat alone quietly, coffee cup in hand. Beds, some adorned with teddy bears, lined one wall.

The chapel walls and pews and columns were covered with notes, cards and banners filled with earnest messages to rescue workers. Hanging over the balcony railing was a huge banner from Oklahoma. Taped to church pews were hundreds of cards from children. In front of me was a sketch of a crooked blue heart and this message from a six-year-old: "I'm really sorry if you lost a family member."

The cards, still pouring in from all over the world, are changed weekly. The hanging tarp outside the chapel is taken down when filled with messages and stacked, along with heaps of others, on a table visible in the loft.

Since late November, the chapel has welcomed the public in small groups of a dozen or less, for a tour. Here in the midst of an outpouring of heartfelt messages from around the world, it's possible to sense a whiff of hope and renewal among the ashes. If outside you are absorbed by the overwhelming sadness, inside you can sense the peace and the healing that is taking place. Here you can witness the humble faces of rescue workers—these men who look like our dads, our brothers, our husbands—and understand better their sense of duty and compassion. It is a place of comfort and serenity and we felt better—and grateful—just being there.

As if to drive home the point, as we were leaving the chapel, a young rescue worker passed us in hardhat and full gear. He caught my eye and for just a moment we connected. He nodded politely, smiling. I wanted to say something, if even to mouth a silent, *thank you* but I couldn't; I was suddenly speechless, overwhelmed. Something was conveyed, I know, because just as my eyes filled with gratitude at the sight of this worker, they also filled with tears.

History defines places in ways one can never predict. If this peaceful chapel was once known for George Washington's visit, it will now also be known as the site of Mayor Rudy Giuliani's parting speech. And it will be forever known as a haven for rescue workers—not to mention visitors—at Ground Zero, as a place of comfort and peace, redefined by tragedy.



Master Builders' Association Winners

The Master Builders' Association (MBA) recently honored the following for winning projects in the 2001 Building Excellence Awards Competition:

■ BEST PROJECT OVER \$7 MILLION

PNC Firstside Center

Architect: L.D. – L.D.A. Astorino Companies

Contractor: Dick Corporation

■ BEST PROJECT UNDER \$7 MILLION

Carnegie Mellon University – Baker Hall

Architect: Burt Hill Kosar Rittelmann

Contractor: Jendoco Construction Corporation

■ EXCELLENCE IN CRAFTSMANSHIP

Howard J. Burnett Center

Architect: MacLachlan Cornelius & Filoni

Contractor: Jendoco Construction Corporation

■ DESIGN – BUILD

Adaptive Reuse of the Allegheny County Jail

Architect: IKM, Inc.

Contractor: Mascaro Construction Co., L.P.

Call for Volunteer Architects

To the Editor:

I was thinking of offering a Spring '02 after school club on art and architecture at my son's school in Squirrel Hill- Colfax School. Your article in Columns "Give a little bit" mentions your involvement with the program at Lincoln Elementary School a few years back. Do you have any more info on this you could hand along to me or any contacts? Also, if there are any architects or designers interested in volunteering an hour and a half once a week, please contact me.

Thank you.

Carol Skinger, Sr. Interior Designer

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Architecture + Water at Carnegie Museum of Art's Heinz Architectural Center

An exhibition of five recent international architectural projects that integrate water with design is now on view at Carnegie Museum of Art's Heinz Architectural Center through May 12, 2002. Architecture + Water explores the challenges encountered when designing buildings on or near water—a critical issue in Pittsburgh and other cities where waterfront architecture and development are increasingly linked with economic progress and quality-of-life concerns. The projects showcased in the exhibition (all of them built or under construction) demonstrate that incorporating water, which is by nature kinetic and invasive, is not only possible with architectural design but also desirable. Furthermore, Architecture + Water shows that in some cases, the successful marriage of water with architecture yields more than exceptional building designs; it can produce innovative types of buildings as well.

Meet the Curators and Designers

On March 23, at 1:00 p.m., Paul Lewis and David J. Lewis, curators and designers of Architecture + Water, will discuss the process of organizing and designing this exhibition and how the projects they selected reflect innovative thinking about the integration of water as a key element in architectural design. Co-sponsored by Pittsburgh's River Life Task Force, the presentation is part of the ongoing process of considering the potential of Pittsburgh's riverfront. Paul Lewis and David J. Lewis are principals in Lewis Tsurumaki. Lewis, an architectural design and research partnership located in New York City. The event is free with museum admission and takes place in the CMA Theater. For information, 412-622-3131.

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