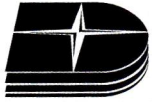


The Boom in Library Construction

# C O L U M N S

VOLUME 17, NO. 3 AIA PITTSBURGH, A CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS APRIL 2003



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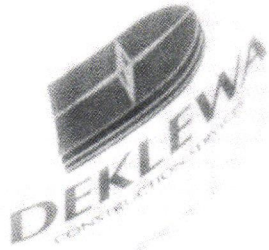
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## Point Me in the Right Direction By Tracy Certo



*It's all part of what is dubbed "information architecture" or the attempt to "tame complexity"*

### If you've ever stood in front of a

touch-screen kiosk and wondered how to start it, you're not alone. It happens more than you think and, according to industrial designer Mickey McManus, you are not (always) the clueless one. Sometimes, just as you suspected, the programmers are at fault. So focused are they on one keen and exciting element, they miss another more basic one.

That's why McManus sometimes spends whole days videotaping users of technology, such as touch-screen kiosks, to see how they—and the programs—fare.

It's all part of what is dubbed "information architecture" or the attempt to "tame complexity", says McManus. Libraries, which are the focus in this issue, are a tough challenge since the different departments are using different information systems. In other words, "they're not using the same language," Manus says to clarify (underscoring his point).

What is the most important thing to communicate to the user? he asks. It varies according to the user's location. Say you're standing 100 feet from the main Carnegie library. Then it might help to know that the library is open. In Oakland, it's impossible to tell, he says. Once you're inside, it's important to get the scope of things: What can I do from here?

In theory it sounds so simple. Yet we all know how complicated it can get. I was thinking about this as I stood at the e-ticket kiosk at the Pittsburgh airport recently. When they work well, they're a thing of beauty — fast, efficient, with little or no waiting. But mine didn't of course. It issued a boarding pass for my connecting flight but none to my final destination. A ticket agent came to my rescue and as he worked some magic from the back of the kiosk and came up with my boarding pass, he politely blamed the computer. And I wondered: Is this the same computer that has me taking a 6 a.m. flight to Philly only to connect to a 7:40 flight to Vegas? Since when do we head east to go west? When I booked the flight, the agent didn't even hint at anything wrong with the plan. "It's a connecting flight,"

she said matter of factly. But it's going the wrong way, I pointed out. She repeated her original line in the same tone of voice. Lacking options, I booked the flight.

It didn't help matters that the plane in Philly was delayed so I ended up flying over Pittsburgh a full four hours after I left. The irony was too maddening to even contemplate (I woke up at 4:15 to achieve this dubious feat) so I didn't, relieved I was finally headed in the right direction. And yes, the trip was well worth it, but still. Where's a complexity tamer when you need one?

If you ask me, McManus sometimes has his work cut out for him but I find it intriguing work nonetheless. And I suggest he contact the airlines because they need him. Right now he's working on signage for the Carnegie Library as they embark on an ambitious program (\$40 million for this current phase) to renovate and update their libraries.

The reasons for the surge of activity in library constructions are plentiful. RAD money for one. And a multitude of incentives to lure people into libraries today, none of them dealing with books.

Libraries have changed greatly, and they're more than they ever were before. But they still have a vast, wonderful selection of books, well worth the visit. And if you're looking for one in particular say, — about an architect who was murdered by that Pittsburgh millionaire, Thaw, was it? — the librarian can help you find out. The helpful librarian in Mt. Lebanon clearly relished the challenge I posed to her. She located *Architect of Desire*, by Susan Lessard, Stanford White's great-granddaughter, and handed it to me with pride. I was impressed.

Turned out to be a good read and came close, but not close enough, to meriting mention in a new feature we're starting this month on Favorite Books. Have a great read you'd like to share? We'd love to hear about it.

Meanwhile, we invite you to survey the scene as *Columns* takes a look at what's happening in our many local and lively libraries.

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**On the cover:** The entrance to the Peters Twp. Children's Library. Architect: Ross Schonder Starzinger Cupcheck. Photo Copyright Ed Massery

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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## AIA Pittsburgh Foundation for Architecture 7TH ANNUAL GOLF OUTING

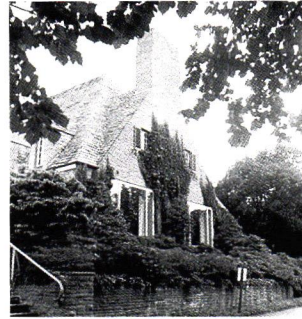
by Edward J. Shriver, Jr., AIA

Legend has it that Benno Janssen, master architect and avid golfer, was thrown out of Oakmont Country Club when he decided he would use his Cadillac as a golf cart. If they thought he did a lot of damage with his driving, they should see what I could do!

This year, AIA Pittsburgh's Foundation for Architecture will host its 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Golf Outing on Monday, May 19<sup>th</sup> to raise money in sup-

port of activities focused on the foundation's mission of "promoting broader understanding of how the environment we design and build affects the quality of our lives." Sadly, Mr. Janssen's crass disregard for club rules (and the fact that they don't hold outings unless "PGA" is in the organization's title somewhere) makes an Oakmont Country Club tournament only a dream. But in memory of Benno, and because of the great time had by all at least year's event, the Golf Committee has decided to return to Longue Vue Club for this year's outing.

Last year's golf tournament at Longue Vue was a huge success thanks to our many sponsors, including event sponsor Nello Construction, dinner sponsor Mistick Construction, lunch sponsor R.E. Crawford Construction, beverage cart sponsor Torriero Construction, skill prize sponsor Richard and Laura Deklewa, and invitation designer Group 2 Design. With over 130 people attending, the event raised more than \$7,500 for the foundation.



The funds were used to underwrite several efforts, including Architects' Saturday, an event that helps students and others understand what architects and designers do, and encourages them to explore opportunities in the design and built communities in Pittsburgh.

This year's event promises to be another fine time. With approximately 120 golfers antici-

ipated, the outing will be a wonderful way for architects in the Pittsburgh region to support their foundation, entertain their clients and staff, and enjoy a great day of golf at one of the best courses in the area. This is not an event for just your marketing staff — you really want to be there yourself!

If golf is not your sport, then stop by after work for drinks and dinner at Longue Vue Club when the round of golf is over. Here, you will enjoy the exceptional architecture of the clubhouse (designed by Benno Janssen), good food, and the company of the architects, contractors, and clients who make Pittsburgh's built environment something of which we are all proud.

***To reserve your spot at the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Golf Outing or for more information, please call 412-471-9548. If you would like to support this year's event by being a sponsor, please call 412-488-3666.***

