

C O L U M N S



WHY ARE AMERICAN CITIES GETTING FATTER?

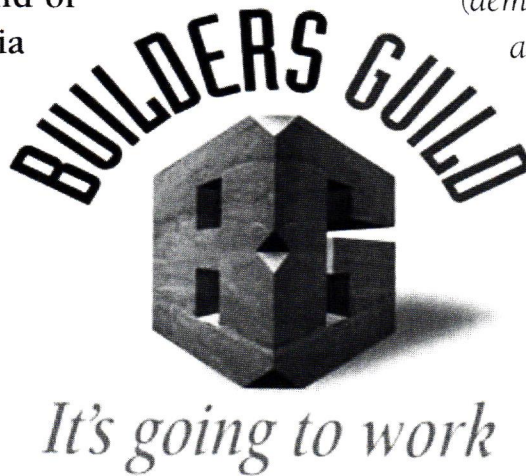
And What Can Architects Do About It?

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Shaped By Our Surroundings *By Tracy Certo*



For years we've made it difficult to make the healthy choice

According to a recent Rand study,

which tallied disease rates in 30 metropolitan areas based on the sprawl index, "Suburban disease may be an important new avenue for health promotion." Those who live in car-dependent areas aren't as healthy as those in more walkable communities, it concludes.

Good news for architects who are already involved in designing livable—read healthier—communities. "Every aspect of our lifestyles, what we eat, whether we smoke, how much we exercise—is shaped by our surroundings," reports the October 3rd issue of Newsweek. "People surrounded by bike paths and walkways tend to use them."

Music to your ears? It is for the people we feature in this issue who are also working toward healthier communities by tackling the growing (sorry, there is no avoiding these unintended puns so let me just apologize in advance) problem of obesity.

In a bit of a departure for *Columns* we decided to focus this issue more on people in the community—not all architects—who are behind some major initiatives. You'll meet Dr. Terence Starz, a dynamo of a leader who is involved in both obesity initiatives as well as the Western Pennsylvania Diversity Initiative. And you'll hear from Aaron Walton of Highmark, a company that knows too well the true and mind-blowing costs of obesity to society. We also feature attorneys Steve Spolar who with his co-chair Jaime Tuite could make a big difference through their work on the Diversity Initiative. These campaigns are indicative of a new trend that focuses on improving options for health—instead of just preaching for reform, a formidable challenge.

As I was starting this feature, I left for vacation to the fittest city in the country, according to *Men's Fitness*. Coincidentally, as I was finishing the feature, I went to a conference in Portland, Oregon, high on the Fittest List at #6.

If you provide opportunities for fitness, will people take advantage of them? Heck, yeah. With the exception of the visit to the new library (p. 5) and the Frank Gehry-designed Experience Music Project, our trip to the Pacific Northwest took place almost entirely outdoors: We hiked the well-groomed and easily accessible trails on Hurricane Ridge and the inviting paths of the rainforest in Olympic National Park. We strolled the state-owned undeveloped

beaches with their glorious sea stacks, kayaked peacefully in the scenic Strait of San Juan de Fuca, and walked all over downtown Seattle. From a speedy Zodiac, we saw dozens of Orcas off the San Juan Islands.

It was much the same in Portland. My friend, Rebecca, and I explored the very appealing Pearl District mentioned here in *Columns* in September, and then the beautiful Columbia River Gorge and Mt. Hood. At one point, watching salmon struggle mightily up fish ladders, the thought occurred to me that even the native fish are in super shape due to their environment.

In Seattle, train commuters haul their bikes onboard so they can pedal from their stops. On a super-sized ferry we watched dozens of cars pull out and then a semi-trailer with a full load of lumber followed by a young man in day-glo gear on a sleek bike. It was a good snapshot of the broad range in transportation. In Portland, so they say, 5,000 people bike to downtown every day.

Anything's possible, as Tom Briney, AIA said when we discussed this. And sure, Pittsburgh has a complicated geography with hills and rivers and bridges—but so does Portland which resembles our beautiful city in a number of ways.

Not that we're lacking in recreational opportunities. Inbetween my two trips I participated in the Dragon Boat race with the Green Team (p. 4). How many cities have a group like the Green Building Alliance let alone dragon boat racing?

But what about our own neighborhoods? Can we walk to the bank, to a healthy restaurant, to our kids' schools? Is it easy and convenient to choose healthy options or must we go out of our way? Now that the word is out, thanks largely (see what I mean?) to the Rand study, it could be helpful in creating more thoughtful community design.

For years we've made it difficult to make the healthy choice, says a doctor quoted in Newsweek. It's time to make it easy. And architects can lead the way.

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On the cover: Like many American cities, Pittsburgh struggles with obesity. Photo illustration by Joe Ruesch.

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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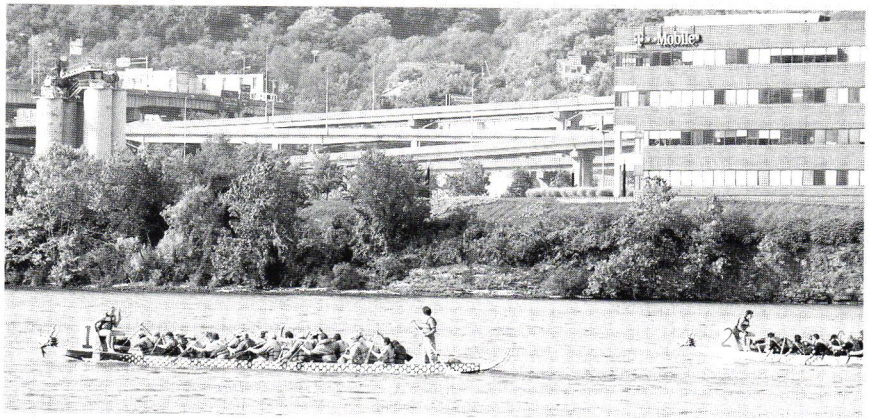
New Staff at AIA Pittsburgh

Say hello at the next membership meeting!

BECKY SPEVACK (LEFT) is the new gal in charge of Member Relations. She is a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, holding a BFA in Glass. Before the AIA, she was production director for artist Robin Stanaway, working on a large scale sculpture which is now on display as a permanent installation at the State Museum of Pennsylvania. She likes buildings, preferably green ones.



QUINN FEDELE (RIGHT), special projects assistant, is a recent graduate from the University of Pittsburgh. When she "walked" this May, she received a BA in Humanities, a minor in Nonprofit Organization Management and a Certificate in Women's Studies. She's excited to work at AIA Pittsburgh after having experienced the new expansion project while working at the Children's Museum. She likes apples, preferably green ones.



MAKING QUITE A SPLASH

We won! Our heat, that is. And we are proud of it.

At the annual Dragon Boat Festival on September 17, The Green Team, which included AIA Pittsburgh's Maya Haptas and the editor of *Columns*, made an impressive showing. Kudos to the organizers, the Green Building Alliance's Rebecca Flora, Ryan Snow and Eamon Geary and Perkins Eastman's Lori Miller. Guiding and drumming our boat to victory was the awesome Kate Northway, 16, the daughter of Laurie Butler and Richard Northway, AIA of Perkins Eastman.

The Pittsburgh Dragon Boat Festival highlights Chinese and pan-Asian cultures in Pittsburgh, and promotes cultural understanding between the East and the West in a fun way. Dragon Boat Racing is a 2,400-year-old traditional Chinese activity known for its color and excitement. The ornately carved and brightly painted dragon heads and tails that adorn the front and back of each craft distinguish the 44 foot-long boat.

Care to join us next year? We might take the whole event.

