



COLUMNS

JUN/10 Developing Community: The impact of local CDCs | Looking Back, Moving Forward: The future of the arena and the Hill District | Twenty Years of Leadership for AIA Pittsburgh | AIA Pittsburgh, a chapter of the American Institute of Architects

COLUMNS

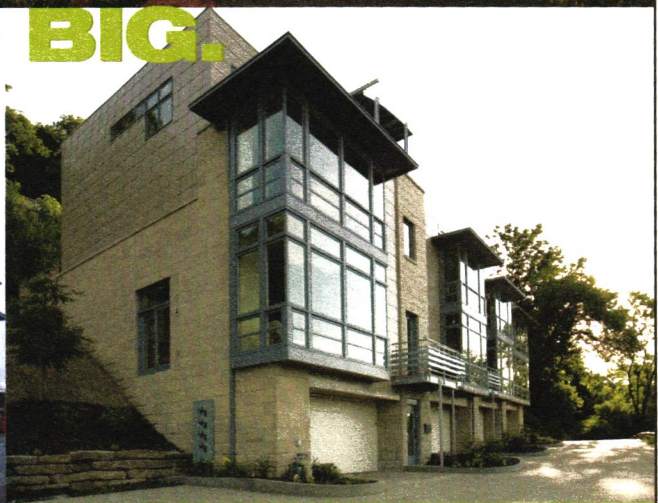
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HOMEFRONT

BY BECKY SPEVACK



I am writing this while sitting on my front porch on a sunny spring morning. A cup of joe from our neighborhood coffee shop helps provide inspiration. Neighbors are out walking their dogs and the sounds of the season are in the air. Sure, the birds are singing and the breeze rustles through the fresh green leaves on surrounding trees. But it's more than that. I hear neighbors calling out greetings to one another from across the street; lawn mowers roar as they march back and forth, back and forth; and about a block away, I can hear the volunteers who are planting flowers in our community garden at the portal of our neighborhood, spending their precious weekend helping to beautify this place we call home. And this may all seem perfectly normal and banal to you. It is, after all, a commonplace description of life in a community, of which there are so many within these city limits. But for me, it still puts a smile on my face, a welcome change from a childhood spent in an unplanned suburb. Don't get me wrong, I had a great childhood, but the neighborhood I grew up in (using the term "neighborhood" loosely) consisted of three streets in the middle of corn fields, with houses that were built there piece-meal over a period of 25 years. There were no sidewalks, no street lights. No main street or business district. We had a pizza shop less than a mile away, but weren't allowed to walk there because the country roads were too narrow and too heavily trafficked. While we have family friends going on 30 years from living there, there wasn't a 'community', and I grew up wishing I lived in a city or town.

As a child, I didn't know about main street programs or what a walkable community was, although I already knew I wanted to live in one. Since leaving the nest, I have only lived in metropoli-

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tan areas, and don't see that changing anytime in the near future. I am excited to share 'city-living' with my daughter, riding the bus to downtown together, walking to the butcher shop or playground, knowing our crossing guard by name. While she won't know playing hide-and-go-seek in a field of corn that's taller than you are, I think the trade-offs we have made are well worth it.

With each new issue of *Columns*, as I piece together the contents, I like to step back and try to determine if there are any themes within it's pages. As each feature came into focus over the past few months, it became quickly apparent that there were a couple of common threads. The first is community – creating, respecting, invigorating community. Our main feature, written by Virginia Shields, takes a look at some local community development corporations and the projects they have and are tackling in the city's neighborhoods. Each place brings with it a different set of problems, but all of the CDCs are working for the betterment of one thing – the community. Another theme that ties into all of our features is revitalization. We have two of our member architects moonlighting as writers – Rob Pfaffmann, AIA and Ken Doyno, AIA – who have taken the time out of their busy lives to contribute their thoughts on the Civic Arena's future. This story has been playing out in city hall and the local newspapers, but these men approach the subject not only looking at what is best for the building, but what is best for the community involved (there's that first theme again). Finally, we are using just a few of these pages to celebrate AIA Pittsburgh's executive director, Anne Swager, Hon. AIA. She celebrated 20 years with this organization in May, and her contributions are innumerable. The work she has done for the chapter, the profession, and the city make her an invaluable asset, and the chapter would not be where it is today without her leadership. She's helped this community of architects become *citizen* architects, guiding volunteer work so that this group of design experts have their voices heard. We thank her for the years she's devoted, and are looking forward to what the future holds. **C**



GUILT BY ASSOCIATION

BY ANNE J. SWAGER, HON. AIA

It is ironic that we are featuring a story in *Columns* this month about local community development corporations. My first interaction with architects began when I ran a local CDC in Mt. Lebanon while sitting on the Board of the South Side Local Development Company (SSLDC). The irony goes even further when you consider that Caroline Boyce, Executive Director of AIA PA was the executive director of SSLDC when I was the executive director for Uptown Mt. Lebanon. We both ran “main street programs” that focused on improving facades and signage in our business districts to attract new businesses and new customers. For both of us, one part of our jobs was managing design review committees which helped determine the awarding of grant money for facade improvements. It became quickly apparent that those projects that came in under an architect’s seal were infinitely better than the ones put together by a local sign company or small general contractor.

Community activism was also a big part of the job. Twenty-five years ago, I got many raised eyebrows and even some sneers when I extolled the virtue of a neighborhood downtown over the mall. “Walkable” did not have any cache and PennDOT, Port Authority, and a host of others were mostly focused on designing for the car and not for the human. The AIA has become much more of an activist organization over the years. But because we are about the profession and for the profession, our mission does not give us a clear cut direction on how to come down on some of the biggest issues of the day. This month we have guest writers giving their perspectives on the Civic Arena. My thanks to Rob Pfaffmann, AIA and Ken Doyno, AIA for being tireless advocates for design and the built environment. They both give inordinate amounts of time and ener-

gy to numerous causes and were very willing to share their thoughts on this issue.

I confess that it feels presumptuous to have an article in *Columns* this month about my 20 year career with the AIA. When the Board and my staff approached me with the idea of celebrating this milestone, I was both deeply flattered and somewhat mortified. My father worked for Procter and Gamble his entire career. He retired when he was 62, just a couple years short of the 40 year milestone. While this may seem remarkable nowadays, it is what everybody did when I was growing up. From that perspective, 20 years seems like a mere drop in the bucket.

It is very flattering to think I have made a difference but the reality is that the AIA is a “team sport.” My staff does the “heavy lifting” and my role is much more one of pushing, pulling, prodding, guiding, and educating. I am very fortunate to have worked with so many of you over the years. I draw a great deal of energy and enthusiasm from your creative spirit and your desire to do things because “it is right.” I have learned an enormous amount from all of you about design, the business of architecture, and the importance of place-making in society. Your passion for what you do has led me to enter every building looking up to see if the owner skimped on the ceiling, and to think nothing of commenting out loud about what I do and do not like about the design of a space even though I couldn’t design my way out of a paper bag.

The public holds the profession of architecture and architects in very high esteem. In retrospect, guilt by association is a powerful aphrodisiac and keeps me coming to work everyday. Riding on your coat tails has been a great ride and to me the fun has only just begun. 