

## Celebrating Architecture, Educating the Public

Contributed by AIA Potomac Valley; AIA Charlotte; AIA Louisiana; AIA Jacksonville, Fla.; and AIA Dallas. Excerpted and adapted from Component Excellence Award entries.

July 2005

*The AIA collects and disseminates Best Practices as a service to AIA members without endorsement or recommendation. Appropriate use of the information provided is the responsibility of the reader.*

### SUMMARY

Public awareness of architecture, and of the architecture profession, falls most often to the programs of state and local AIA components. In recent years, components around the country have created a host of initiatives that educate the public; reach out to students; recognize local architects; strengthen relationships with allied professionals and government officials; and generate media coverage—initiatives that celebrate architecture.

### OUTREACH BUILDS THE CONSTITUENCY FOR GOOD DESIGN

Some components focus such efforts on annual Architecture Week programs. Others spread their education, awards, scholarship, and tour programs over the course of the year. Collectively, they contribute to a common goal: increasing public understanding of the value of good design in any community.

### SHOW AND TELL

Building tours form the centerpiece of many outreach efforts. After all, how better to tell than to show? AIA Potomac Valley decided in 2002 to begin a concerted effort to include the public in tours of award-winning projects by its members. That first year, these three tours collectively attracted about 250 people over a five-month period:

- A tour of the newly constructed St. David's Episcopal Worship Center in Ashburn, Va., drew 50 people, about half of whom were not architects
- A tour of the new Carlin Springs Elementary School in Arlington, Va., drew 60 people, about one-third of whom were not architects
- Where the Architects Live, took 141 people (few of whom were architects) to six architects' homes through a self-guided driving tour and raised more than \$2,000 in donations for Habitat for Humanity

Architects' homes are also high on the tour agenda in Dallas, where Architecture Week each April

became Architecture Month by proclamation of the Dallas City Council. The celebration also has included tours of historic homes and renovated buildings, walking tours of distinctive neighborhoods, and other design features of the city such as outdoor murals and sculpture gardens.

### SHINE DURING ARCHITECTURE WEEK

Even a relatively small, unstaffed component can offer an impressive Architecture Week program that raises the profile of architecture and the profession. AIA Jacksonville, Fla., made public awareness the priority of its annual May event. In 2001 it sponsored design competitions, lectures, publications, a Young Architects Forum, and other events, all under a common theme: 1901-2001: Rebirth and Renewal.

The theme referred to the Great Fire of 1901 in Jacksonville and the city's creative architectural aftermath over a period of rapid growth. To ensure success, the component designated several committee chairs, each in charge of a different part of the event; 2001 Component President Thomas J. Fisher, AIA, coordinated the effort. The aspects of Architecture Week targeted many different groups and audiences:

- **Birdhouse competition.** Architects, designers, and children designed 35 birdhouses for the competition, which was staged in a local mall and benefited Habitat for Humanity.
- **Newspaper advertising supplement.** AIA Jacksonville partnered with the Jacksonville *Business Journal* to publish a 12-page tabloid insert with photographs of all projects submitted for the 2001 Design Awards.
- **Arts magazine special issue.** *Arbus*, the regional arts and business magazine, focused its May/June issue on the artistic aspects of architecture and downtown redevelopment in the context of the Rebirth and Renewal theme.
- **Lecture by Malcolm Holzman, FAIA.** Holzman, the 2001 Design Award juror, addressed more than 85 people at the local art museum, which also featured a photography

show about the Great Fire of 1901. Local historians added their perspectives at a “Lecture in the Park.”

- **Young Architects Forum.** A panel composed of a recent graduate, a young working designer, and an older architect addressed a variety of issues.
- **Fellows luncheon and Design Awards gala.** The gala drew more than 300 people and elevated the annual awards presentation, making a significant outreach to celebrate good design.

In North Carolina, AIA Charlotte pulls out all the stops for its Architecture Week program each September, which lasts as long as two weeks to accommodate the plans of its active committees. The public is invited to free tours of several local architecture firms. An annual Government Affairs Day includes a luncheon attended by government officials and open to architecture students. Lectures, tours, awards, and continuing education seminars for architects round out an ambitious program that has generated substantial local media coverage.

AIA Dallas, in addition to the tour programs, fills its Architecture Month with special lectures; panel discussions; exhibits; continuing education seminars for architects; a fund-raising golf tournament; parties; and events for children as well as high-school and college students interested in architecture careers, including a scholarship award to a Texas Tech architecture student. Apart from Architecture Week, AIA Dallas sponsors other outreach programs, such as its *Retrospect* exhibit and poster competition, that further inform the public about the benefits and contributions of good design on the built environment and general quality of life.

Partnerships and sponsorships have helped this large, staffed component achieve such an ambitious scope for its Architecture Month programs. Partners include Preservation Dallas, the Dallas Architecture Forum, the Dallas Architectural Foundation, the American Society of Landscape Architects, and various neighborhood groups. Each group schedules and plans at least one key event, and the AIA Dallas public relations staff and committee create the master outreach plan and handle most of the media coverage.

### **CELEBRATE ARCHITECTURE: FOCUS ON DESIGN PROFESSIONALS AND STUDENTS**

AIA Louisiana brings together architects, other design professionals, and students in its annual Celebrate Architecture event at the Old State Capitol

in Baton Rouge. Dennis Brady, AIA, former AIA Louisiana vice president, called it “one of the most stimulating architectural seminars available to architects.”

The day-long program of presentations and dialogue—led by a different set of three nationally acclaimed architects each year—enables attendees to earn six hours of continuing education in health, safety, and welfare while also providing fellowship and networking opportunities. Schools of architecture have used the event to expose students to new dimensions of design and the architecture community. The component provides exclusive funding for the event to maintain “a pristine focus on design and the architectural profession.”

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

**AIA Potomac Valley Chapter.** Contact Lloyd N. Unsell Jr., Hon. AIA, executive director, [lloyd@aiapvc.org](mailto:lloyd@aiapvc.org).

**AIA Charlotte.** Contact Erica C. Rohrbacher, executive director, [erica@aiacharlotte.org](mailto:erica@aiacharlotte.org).

**AIA Louisiana.** Contact Lynn Robertson, executive director, [lynnrobertston@aiala.com](mailto:lynnrobertston@aiala.com).

**AIA Jacksonville.** Contact Lewis E. Everline Jr., AIA, president, [leverline@rs-architects.com](mailto:leverline@rs-architects.com).

**AIA Dallas.** Contact Paula Clements, CAE, [pclements@dallasaia.org](mailto:pclements@dallasaia.org).

### **RESOURCES**

#### **More Best Practices**

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 22.08.13 Plan Savannah 2000
- 22.08.09 Architects Design Rebirth of a Community
- 22.08.02 Community Leadership in Urban Design

#### **Key Terms**

- Leadership
- Associations
- Design associations
- Architecture associations
- The American Institute of Architects
- AIA components