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THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF AIA IOWA

Room for Improvement:
Spaces for Learning

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editor's letter

Grant Nordby, AIA
Editor, Iowa Architect

Welcome!

A preschool play space. A high school with a built-in career academy. An agricultural training center. Another for linemen and other skilled trades. A nonprofit practicing locally what it preaches globally. Learning places come in all shapes and sizes these days!

In just a few generations, formal education has gone from elite luxury to public good to competitive necessity. From youngest youth to oldest age, we are awash in information. Access now exceeds capacity, data plans outpacing human wisdom. Places of learning scramble to make room for change. But change yields new insights, new access, and opportunities for self-directed, lifelong learning.

In this issue we explore spaces for learning, from the traditionally structured to the specialized or unconventional. How can architecture leave room for improvement?

iaarchitect

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AIA Iowa

AIA IOWA CELEBRATES 120 YEARS

WORDS : PAUL MANKINS, FAIA

The Iowa Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA Iowa) is celebrating an important milestone: Our component is 120 years old this year. It is a fitting time to look back on our accomplishments and highlight some of the things that make AIA Iowa truly unique.

What started in 1904 as a small group of architects practicing in what was then a remote Midwestern state has grown into a thriving component with nearly 900 members and 200 Allied members. From the beginning, AIA Iowa has been a statewide component. We are now divided into five sections, each providing programming and services to our members. The quality and effectiveness of these programs have resulted in a remarkably high percentage of licensed architects in Iowa choosing to become members of the AIA. This "member ratio" has been more than 90 percent for many years, and the energy these members bring to our chapter makes AIA Iowa one of the nation's premier components.

"AIA Iowa has a storied history and, over the last 120 years, has developed several long-standing programs. Among these is our annual convention, which goes back more than a century."

AIA Iowa has a storied history and, over the last 120 years, has developed several long-standing programs. Among these is our annual convention, which goes back more than a century. As members, we have grown accustomed to the quality of this design-focused conference, but if you were to visit other states, you would find that the AIA Iowa convention is far more robust. Recent meetings have drawn more than 1,000 participants and include keynotes from some of the nation's premier design talents. This fall convention was augmented with a Spring Conference beginning more than 25 years ago, providing an additional opportunity for our members to gather to discuss and learn about current topics impacting the profession. So, while many components struggle to have a single, small annual meeting, we have two well-established conferences. This is

just one of the programs that make AIA Iowa extraordinary.

Equally striking, AIA Iowa has published its own magazine for nearly 70 years. *Iowa Architect* has been the only component publication in the Central States Region (Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and Oklahoma) for decades and is among the only remaining component publications in the nation. It would be easy to think that all AIA chapters have magazines. In fact, very few do. Moreover, the quality of *Iowa Architect* has been recognized with multiple Presidential Citations and a Component Excellence Award. In 1994, when the AIA convened a jury to review all the organization's component publications, *Iowa Architect* was recognized as the Outstanding Component Publication in the nation. So, not do we only publish a magazine, but it is routinely judged to be exceptional. And, like all of AIA Iowa's programming, this is only possible through the efforts and energy of our dedicated members.

It's important to note that we continue to expand our programming. We don't simply rest on our laurels. To assist with advocacy, we began Architects Day on the Hill nearly 20 years ago as well as the Citizen Architect Program, which recognizes our members who are actively involved in community leadership. These programs connect us with state and national leaders and allow us to effectively communicate our professional concerns. Both programs grow with each successive year and have helped advance our profession, elevate the perception of architects, and improve the practice environment in Iowa.

Most recently, we have developed a set of new programs like Bee an Architect, a 2024 American Society of Associations Power of Associations award winner, which inspires young people to consider architecture as a career. In addition, we have developed the *School Guidebook to Architecture* as a resource to help Iowa schools navigate the design and building process. These programs build upon the Architecture in the Schools program, dating back to the late 1980s, and have exposed thousands of Iowan students to architecture. These students will not all become architects, but some will become clients who have a greater understanding of the power of architecture to transform communities. In addition, our members serve the state with Disaster Assistance volunteer program and, for the last three decades, have educated the public about our architectural heritage through the activities of the Iowa Architectural Foundation.

AIA Iowa's programming is impressive and simply wouldn't be possible without the remarkable staff leadership we have enjoyed throughout our history. Jessica Reinert, Hon. AIA Iowa, and, before her, Suzanne Schwengels have guided our component for nearly 40 years (that's more than 30 percent of our history). Their deep experience, coupled with the work of all the AIA Iowa staff, has allowed us to expand programs and incrementally improve them year after year. Moreover, it provides us with the confidence to begin new initiatives and remain relevant to our members and the public. As Iowans, we build on past success. We don't repeatedly reinvent the wheel. That is both key to our strength and the result of seasoned staff leadership.

It is important to remember that, as members, *we are the AIA*. As a result, this is our 120th anniversary. We should take some time to congratulate ourselves and understand that we have a strong chapter because of our efforts. However, it is important to consider what comes next. Think about what the next 120 years have in store.

"It is important to remember that, as members, *we are the AIA*. As a result, this is our 120th anniversary. We should take some time to congratulate ourselves and understand that we have a strong chapter because of our efforts."

AIA Iowa Allied Members

As a profession, architecture thrives on one key ingredient: collaboration. Throughout each project, our Iowa Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA Iowa) members are constantly connecting with experts who provide the products, materials, and services that make their buildings possible. Our AIA Iowa Allied members are our partners throughout it all. Our profession relies on the lasting relationships we have with product suppliers, contractors, developers, manufacturers, distributors, engineers, landscape architects, planners, artists, and vendors in fields allied to architecture. No two projects are alike, and our AIA Iowa members value the deep understanding that each Allied member has about their area of expertise. Allied members help architects meet the ultimate project goal of marrying form with function to build an aesthetically pleasing but sustainably produced building.

"The Allied membership within AIA Iowa is a crucial component of the design ecosystem and holistic collaboration process. Being an Allied member signals to an architectural firm that we are invested in good design and their success. Allied members serve as trusted resources of information, services, and products to firms across the state of Iowa. I am proud of our support of AIA Iowa and its member firms through our investment of time, money, and energy," says AIA Iowa Allied Director Grant Taylor of The Hansen Company.

THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR AIA IOWA ALLIED MEMBERS FOR BEING THE BEST PARTNERS IN THIS PROFESSION:

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"When you learn, teach. When you get, give." - Maya Angelou

on the boards

Projects
In Progress

Sudlow Middle School

Davenport, Iowa
Bray Architects

Davenport Community School District completed a master planning effort that led to the adoption of a districtwide grade reconfiguration plan at the middle school level. To support the reconfiguration, the district's intermediate schools will be expanded to accommodate sixth graders.

Sudlow Intermediate School will transition to a middle school serving sixth- to eighth-grade students. The like-new school will include a three-story educational wing that will house all three grade levels, as well as provide a new office, kitchen, cafeteria, and library. New construction of appropriately sized classroom space will meet the needs of additional students and programs and allow for a house model approach to the building layout.

Other features include additional gym space to better support the larger building population size; better integration of spaces for technology, science, and consumer sciences; improved site safety and logistics; and outdoor spaces for student activities.

Little Priest Tribal College Lab

Winnebago, Nebraska
PLaN Architecture

Little Priest Tribal College is a small college located in Winnebago, Nebraska, and serves the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska. In an effort to increase the size and quality of their science classrooms, the school has set out to develop a state-of-the-art biology and chemistry lab building. Somewhat unique, this building also houses a student lounge and student services offices.

The three-story building currently under construction is envisioned to be the first of many new structures on the hilltop campus. Given its site on the edge of the future campus expansion, the building serves as a gateway—or welcoming point—for both the new and old campus. The design of the building is relatively warm, and its modern cube form is intended to welcome students to campus and be an example of the great education resources available to them.


TRAINING CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE
MIDAMERICAN
ENERGY COMPANY

DRIVING DALLAS COUNTY

MIDAMERICAN DALLAS COUNTY TRAINING CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE

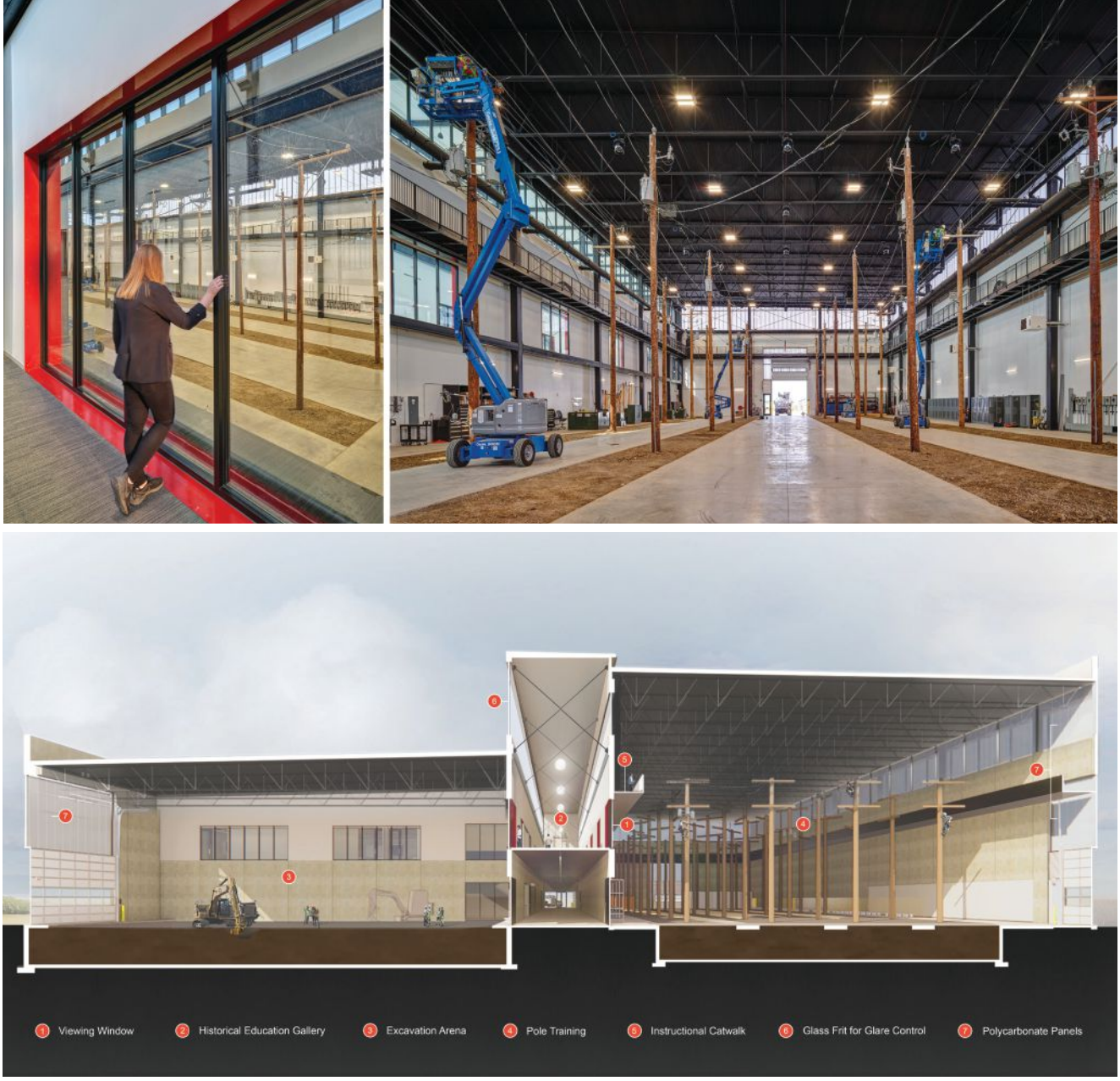
WORDS : JUSTIN BURNHAM, AIA **IMAGES** : CAMERON CAMPBELL, AIA, INTEGRATED STUDIO **ARCHITECT** : INVISION

We are surrounded by landscapes. Gazing out the car window is one example. The drive to Dallas County—west of Des Moines on I-80—passes by swelling suburbs, winding interchanges, asphalt, cell towers, fields, trees, and a veterans cemetery. Staring at a screen is another example. Many car trips also include a passenger engaging with the vastness of the digital landscape.

MidAmerican Energy Company's (MEC) new Dallas County Training Center for Excellence connects these two realms. It can be reached by a turn north off I-80 or a turn south from Highway 6. Along that highway, round electrical poles alternate between tall and short. Nearby is a sizable electrical substation and a recently completed Apple data center, which requires ample and consistent service—as do people living throughout Iowa.

The nature of a utility company is to deploy utilitarian thinking. The team from INVISION understood this project could "settle into" its agrarian surroundings while also making a "bold statement" for MEC. To navigate this duality, the site is divided into a public-facing east side and a traffic-controlled west side. The main entry faces east and the walls above—more than two stories tall—project outward to create a nicely proportioned

At left: The nature of a utility company is to deploy utilitarian thinking. The team from INVISION understood this project could "settle into" its agrarian surroundings while also making a "bold statement" for MEC. To navigate this duality, the site is divided into a public-facing east side and a traffic-controlled west side.



Above: The 143,000-square-foot facility centralizes 12 companywide training programs and enhances its electrical, gas, and wind generation apprenticeship programs.

soffit. This begins a sequence of highly choreographed spaces inside and outside.

"MEC wanted it to be a showpiece—and that was delivered to us day one—it needed to make a statement." says INVISION's principal and managing architect, Jason DeVries, AIA.

DeVries continues, "The president, at the time, wanted to consolidate." The site is shared to leverage synergies between the Dallas County Training Center for Excellence and its predecessor, the Dallas County Service Center, immediately to the south. "We had a really long strip of property. After the service center was built, there wasn't much room until you reach the north end of the property."

The 143,000-square-foot facility centralizes 12 companywide training programs and enhances its electrical, gas, and wind generation apprenticeship programs. "We sort of started from scratch," says DeVries. "It is a unique program in that no other public utility at the time had brought together all their training components under one roof."

Unification: Spine and Portals

In July 2018, four INVISION team members began meeting weekly with MEC to prepare a program booklet. As design began, the team understood the building lent itself to long rectangular floor plates. The diagram of the building employs a circulation spine, which connects three boxes that further divide into apprenticeship arenas—north pole training, south excavation area, and west vehicle bay. When outlining the design strategy, DeVries explains, "It's actually [also] split vertically, so the entire lower level is sort of a dirty space."

"Two of the larger arenas have dirt floors in them. In the excavation arena, we created a concrete pool—a bathtub, in a sense—and then filled it with 8 feet of dirt so the trainees could bring in life-sized equipment and dig for buried mocked up gas lines. In the Pole Training Arena, 50-foot poles are driven into 8-foot-deep dirt strips to simulate real world conditions."

The second level consolidates "clean" spaces such as offices, conference rooms, computer labs, and internal viewing portals.

The circulation spine is the unifying precept. “When MEC takes potential trainees through, from the upper spaces those people can look down into various training arenas.” The spine is primarily clad in 40 percent fritted glass to allow ample daylight while reducing heat gain, and the portal frames are sturdy steel plates finished with a MEC-red powder coat.

The biggest arena houses pole training. The room needed a 50-foot vertical clearance and a catwalk that put the instructor at eye level with trainees working with live electricity. To maximize natural lighting, there are polycarbonate clerestory windows on three sides and borrowed light from the southern glazing.

At the lower level, training also includes a substation arena, a construction lab, an HVAC lab, and a welding area. Outside vehicles practice backup maneuvers, and there are 10-foot square wood-framed huts, each with appliances—dryers, stoves, water heaters—from different decades so trainees can work on anything they encounter in the field.

“MEC requires their trainees to complete their specific training program, regardless of their previous educational degrees. It is a three-year apprenticeship where they’ll work in a safe capacity in this center on simulators and work their way up to real equipment with non-live electric and gas lines, then out in the field with a more seasoned veteran,” DeVries explains.

The break room is located near the east entry, and it utilizes double-height space to connect both levels. The second level features an enclosed patio with a glass overhead door that blurs the boundaries between indoors and outdoors. “Every asset strives for one unique component,” DeVries explains. “We get excited about ways to engage nature without being outside. People can grab lunch downstairs, then they can go upstairs to eat or work there.” The benefit of the elevated “split” scheme includes internal views of action and external views of the landscape.

Alignment: Delivery and Rigor

MEC and INVISION have completed nearly 20 projects together now, but the training center was just the second. The client had an ambitious schedule and Hansen Company on board as prime contractor. Beginning in October 2018, the architects and consultants—Bishop, Raker Rhodes, and IMEG—issued five bid packages over six months: utilities, foundation, envelope, interiors, and finishes to meet MEC’s 2020 completion deadline.

“You had to be on top of your game,” says DeVries. He credits the entire team for making it happen. Internally, INVISION’s team included specialists for site, programming, and enclosure. Externally, Hansen Company and Waldinger led weekly clash detection meetings that rigorously coordinated steps before they happened in the field.

The architects embraced the client’s perspective and data-driven process. Early on, they immersed themselves in the discovery of program needs and organized mined data into a color coordinated filing system, tied to the colors used in the field for buried line demarcations. Later, MEC’s desire for minimal maintenance aligned with the durability of precast concrete, glass, and fiber cement cladding. INVISION then composed a series of modules ranging from 6-inch-wide panels to 4-foot-wide glass and 8-foot-wide precast walls.

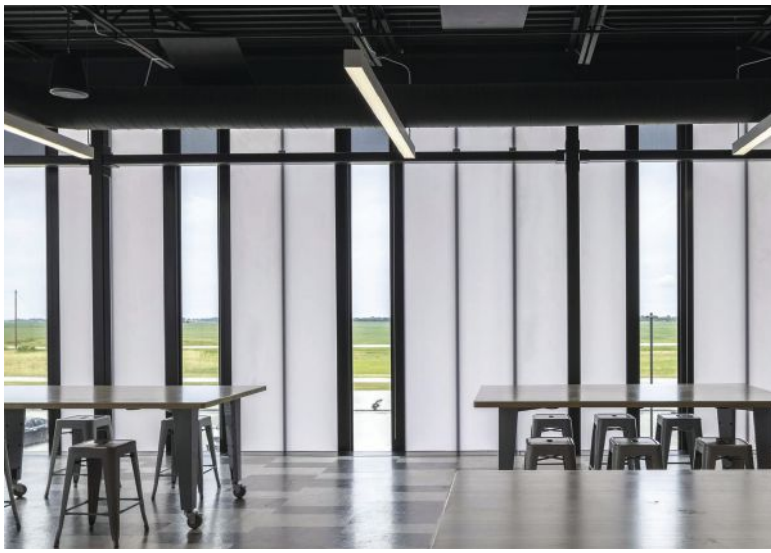
The rigor of detail and proportion makes this training center a pleasing piece of architecture in the landscape. It serves as an economic driver for Iowans in Dallas County and beyond—all while shaping learning through digital and physical engagement.

Above: The second level consolidates “clean” spaces such as offices, conference rooms, computer labs, and internal viewing portals.

GREENE COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

School Pride

WORDS : JAMES SPILLER, AIA **IMAGES** : ALEX MICHL, ASSOC. AIA **ARCHITECT** : OPN ARCHITECTS



At top: The new high school is not a traditional building but a campus: four buildings with a common interstitial canopy. Each building operates independently and provides specialized spaces for curricular blocks: academic, athletic, performing arts, and the career academy. **Bottom left:** Each building is distinguishable as its own structure, but the elegant use of precast concrete panels, glazing, black steel, and wood accents provide a common language for the campus. **Bottom right:** The academic block offers floor-to-ceiling windows across two levels, a continuous ground-to-roof expression in a handsomely rhythmic facade.

Greene County Community Schools celebrated its 10th year in 2024, a result of the school district consolidation announced in 2014. Such mergers recalibrate pride in local communities and change gathering places for community events, but they also create new opportunities for educating students. Reflecting on the origin story of the new Greene County High School, Ken Hagen, AIA, OPN Architects K-12 regional leader, recounts that community leaders asked, "How do we propel this community into the future? How do we tie the school to the best future economic direction of the county?"

The team, led by OPN Architects, began by hosting listening sessions in the four largest population centers of Greene County. Feedback came in loud and clear: The plan should improve the quality of life throughout the *entire* county, not just one community. OPN developed communication and marketing materials to articulate this new vision for Greene County citizens. In 2018, the voters agreed, authorizing the design and construction of a new Greene County High School, along with relocation of the Greene County Middle School to the former high school building, as well as health and safety improvements at all facilities.

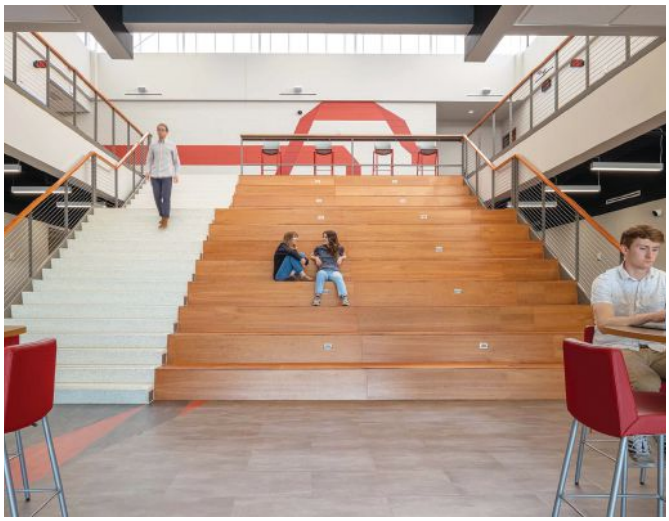
Greene County Community Schools partnered with Iowa Central Community College to create the Career Academy, a concurrent program where high school students may take associate degree coursework in agricultural business and management, construction trades, business, culinary arts, and child care. Enrollment in the Academy is at record levels, with students eager to access real-world coursework.

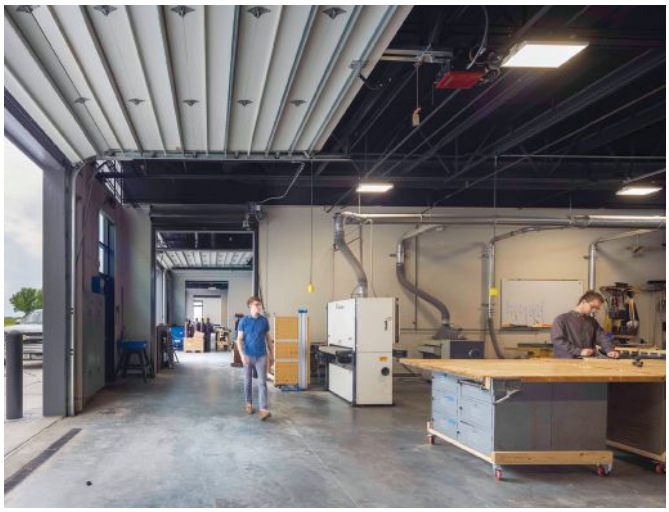
Hagen notes the school is "a place for the community and district to make its own. So often, architecture is looked at as a static monument—a snapshot in time—but this high school project is very different, something much greater than K-12 education." Greene County Community Schools even invested in greater enrollment capacity, a major win toward helping Grow Greene County to recruit new businesses and create new housing.

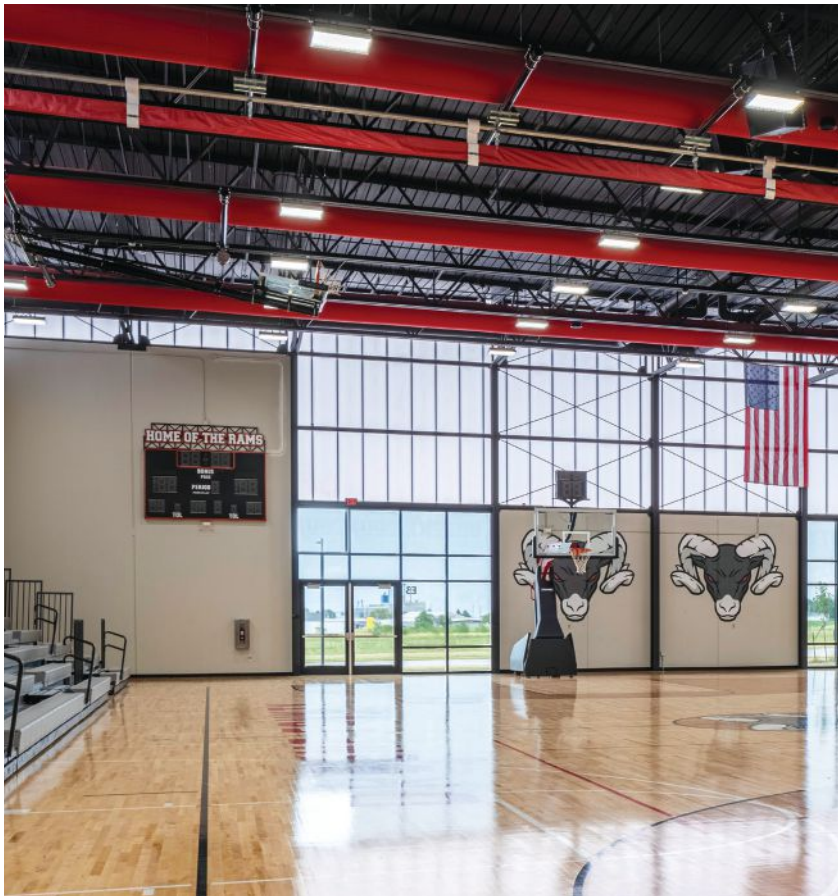
The new high school is not a traditional building but a campus: four buildings with a common interstitial canopy. Each building operates independently and provides specialized spaces for curricular blocks: academic, athletic, performing arts, and the career academy.

Each building is distinguishable as its own structure, but the elegant use of precast concrete panels, glazing, black steel, and wood accents provide a common language for the campus. Hagen explains that "each block is talking to the other. But they feel and behave differently, designed for each function's requirements." Interior walls are precast concrete or concrete block walls, floors are typically polished concrete or high-performing LVT, and the objects one touches by hand are typically warm wood. A lightweight black steel canopy and translucent clerestory span from building block to building block, forming an open interior community commons. The commons give access to the campus from all directions, each entry framing a view to surrounding vistas: farm fields at the north and west, agricultural production facilities at the east, and the community water tower and the town of Jefferson to the south.

The academic block offers floor-to-ceiling windows across two levels, a continuous ground-to-roof expression in a handsomely rhythmic facade. The precast panels taper as they meet the ground, giving unexpected lightness to the weighty concrete. This block is compact but maintains an open feel. A looping corridor features a common learning stair with a large, glazed wall, open to a courtyard, smartly placed at the center of the corridor ring, daylighting the center of what should be the







darkest space. Classrooms are large and simple, with floor-to-ceiling glazing providing long viewsheds and ample daylight. The material palette in the academic block is branded to school colors, employing low-maintenance and sound-absorbing materials. The academic block is strikingly punctuated by the art classroom—a glowing block of direct and filtered light—cantilevered over the north entry to the school.

A ring of translucent glazing also surrounds the ceiling of the gymnasium, stretching from floor to roof at the east facade for a dramatic wall of light, a sneaky home court advantage with daylight behind the eastern basket. The athletic block is a celebration of the physical; it is bright and loud. The interior of the gymnasium is sound-reflective precast concrete, amplifying the formidable home crowd. Locker rooms ring the gymnasium, and a weight room acts as a lantern, featuring three large walls of filtered light.

The performing arts block is the tallest, its vertical fly loft echoing the county courthouse bell tower in the distance. This block is anchored by a 700-seat auditorium with state-of-the-art sound engineering so excellent that it hosted the state tournament for performing arts this year. It is more inward-focused than the other blocks to maintain sound and light control for performances. Practice rooms for choir and band border the auditorium in light-filled one-story spaces, open and flexible for various practice configurations.

The Career Academy is a distinctive black precast concrete, differentiated for its focus on Iowa Central Community College coursework. It is a series of program-specific spaces, each voluminous and filled with soft northern daylight. The agricultural and construction trade spaces host advanced manufacturing facilities with flexible floor plans and access for large equipment. The culinary arts program features a full commercial kitchen and a student-run restaurant serving patrons at the north entry. Dinner and a show, the natural pairing of performing and culinary arts, has become a new point of pride in the events calendar.

Yet the commons—the space between—is one the students have made fully their own. Two full precast concrete panels beside the gymnasium entrance now host an impressive mural dedicated to the ram—the school mascot—designed and painted by the art class this past spring. A kiosk, designed and built by construction students, welcomes students and visitors for athletic competitions. State competition banners march through the commons, and student projects are featured brightly in delicately framed wooden cases.

The new Greene County High School is the outcome of a decade of community collaboration. Its design prioritizes the functional performance of each curricular block, material resilience, safe wayfinding, and daylit spaces. Students learn in a campus imbued with affirming markers of lifelong learning, celebrating efforts to prepare students for life beyond high school and teeming with a new community pride.

At top and bottom: The athletic block is a celebration of the physical; it is bright and loud. The interior of the gymnasium is sound-reflective precast concrete, amplifying the formidable home crowd. Locker rooms ring the gymnasium, and a weight room acts as a lantern, featuring three large walls of filtered light. **Opposite, top:** A looping corridor features a common learning stair with a large, glazed wall, open to a courtyard, smartly placed at the center of the corridor ring, daylighting the center of what should be the darkest space. **Opposite, middle:** Classrooms are large and simple, with floor-to-ceiling glazing providing long viewsheds and ample daylight.

LEARNING TOGETHER

Stanley Center for Peace and Security

WORDS: GRANT NORDBY, AIA **IMAGES**: CAMERON CAMPBELL, AIA, INTEGRATED STUDIO **ARCHITECT**: NEUMANN MONSON ARCHITECTS

How can one teach with a *place*? Through courageous choices, by revealing forgotten stories and hidden processes, by bringing others along for the journey, and by inviting in through open doors. The new Stanley Center for Peace and Security headquarters in Muscatine, Iowa, demonstrates each of these.

"If we're going to build or renovate a building, we're going to do it in a way that helps us walk our talk on climate change," says Keith Porter, CEO and president of the Stanley Center for Peace and Security.

When the Stanley Center elected to leave rented office space in Muscatine, Iowa, its core values led stakeholders through subsequent decisions, resulting in a facility of startlingly clear social purpose far beyond its footprint. Notably, they again chose to remain in Muscatine, occupying the vacant former public library. Acting locally in this fashion was a bold choice for an organization "thinking globally" through complex international efforts toward nonviolence, nuclear safety, and climate mitigation. But it served as a way to remain rooted in principles of local engagement. Core values also led stakeholders—steered by Neumann Monson Architects—to pursue Living Building certification, a sustainability standard so rigorous that the building is the first of its kind in Iowa.

The Living Building Challenge (LBC) germinated in 2006 amid designers' frustration with incremental improvements in sustainable practices. Instead, they leapfrogged toward *regeneration*, requiring certified sites to meet seven rigorous principles, called petals: to operate within solar and water budgets set by nature, to use only materials "safe for all species throughout time," to restore a healthy relationship toward local ecology, to support a just and equitable world through action, to optimize health and well-being, and to uplift and educate the human spirit. These principles resonated with Stanley Center values, drawing stakeholders toward certification despite the risks they knew would come with tackling a challenge that neither they, nor many on the design team, had yet experienced.

Above: After deletions for courtyard and windows, some 95 percent of the original structure (by weight) remains. The original masonry exterior had virtually no insulation—quite a challenge for a net-positive energy project. Architects took the opportunity to wrap it in an insulation overcoat and protected the insulation from the sun with acetylated and charred Accoya wood cladding, transforming the exterior appearance with no uptick in embodied carbon.

Above: Local programming stems from regenerative lessons rooted in the facility's transformation. One example: The existing building was larger than needed, while the cramped urban site offered little green space capable of absorbing rainwater or furnishing food and habitat. Solution: Prominently locate two 6,250-gallon aboveground rainwater cisterns and remove nearly one-third of the building's volume to create a courtyard, in which staff maintain a vegetable garden providing them and the Muscatine Center for Social Action with fresh produce.

The "Place" petal of the LBC requires teams to explore the site's ecological and human history. Discoveries during this process informed site selection, guiding the Stanley Center to an outwardly improbable choice: retrofitting the hulking old public library. Seeing potential in the homely structure required imagination but offered a chance to reknit an unraveling patch of Muscatine's urban fabric while setting an example in reuse. "You can have an ugly duckling that nobody wants, and look how it can be transformed!" says Neumann Monson Project Sustainability Lead Lyndley Kent, AIA.

Project Manager Sally Obernolte, AIA, recounts, "This was seen as almost a heroic move among the community. People were relieved and excited that somebody was going to do something with the property."

The site checked many values-based boxes, notably a walkable downtown location with a deep history in education—including African American businessman Alexander Clark's 1860s-era struggle for educational civil rights. Others: reuse of an existing building's embodied carbon, plus fruitful connections with new neighbors—like the Muscatine Center for Social Action (MCSA)—that uplift and affirm others' humanity.

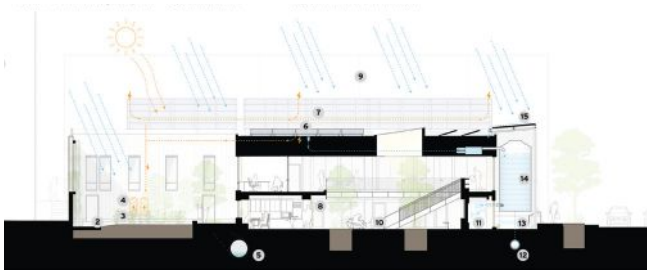
As Mark Seaman, Stanley Center vice president and director of communications, puts it, "This building was celebrated as a center of learning for over 100 years. And the building's place in people's hearts became increasingly clear, especially as construction continued and people showed interest in the process. Continuing this location as a center of learning, through local programming, was important to us."

Local programming stems from regenerative lessons rooted in the facility's transformation. One example: The existing building was larger than needed, while the cramped urban site offered little green space capable of absorbing rainwater or furnishing food and habitat. Solution: Prominently locate two 6,250-gallon aboveground rainwater cisterns and remove nearly one-third of the building's volume to create a courtyard, in which staff maintain a vegetable garden providing them and the MCSA with fresh produce.

Another example: Achieving net-zero electricity consumption with available roof area required extending a solar canopy over the entrance and the alley between the Stanley Center and the MCSA. This provides shade and shelter from precipitation, a boon to individuals queuing down the alley for a meal at the food pantry. Yet another: Staff give regular guided tours of the facility and its unusual features. Soon, educational signage and an alley mural will augment the tours. These welcoming gestures have made friends and advocates of the community.

The building itself weaves old and new together, the former justified and transcended by the latter. It retains the modest proportions of the two-story original, but ungainly bay windows are replaced by an elegant glass wall shaded by a slender new solar canopy, below which overflow rainwater from enormous cisterns filters through a lush native rain garden. Entering takes one directly into a domestically scaled atrium (original), newly skylit and renamed the "living room." This is furnished in suitably residential materials approved by the famously strict Red List. The living room is ringed by a generous second-floor balcony (original) and daylit private offices (new) used for teleconferencing. From the living room, one sees through an open kitchen and rear window wall to a new courtyard garden "backyard," reinforcing the impression of domestic approachability. Why work from home when work feels this homelike?

After deletions for courtyard and windows, some 95 percent of the original structure (by weight) remains. Sawcut-and-patched concrete is sealed and original conduit exposed, while the complex rainwater system is conspicuously visible above ceilings and through interior windows. All is forthright and direct, with locally harvested white oak casework companionably nestled beside original painted concrete columns. Design principal Khalid Khan, Associate AIA, explains the



design's forthright essentialism: "Doing something for the sake of doing it—that's not how we operate."

The original masonry exterior had virtually no insulation—quite a challenge for a net-positive energy project. Architects took the opportunity to wrap it in an insulation overcoat and protected the insulation from the sun with acetylated and charred Accoya wood cladding, transforming the exterior appearance with no uptick in embodied carbon.

The courtyard and kitchen were complicated by a massive 100-year-old tunnel channeling a former stream diagonally through the site. Any overflow drainage from the courtyard is routed beneath the tunnel to the rain garden, and ground-floor features incorporate the tunnel's impinging bulk, turning a liability into an asset.

Design choices teach and telegraph the values that shaped them. Those choices render other good choices more likely, shaping lives in an outward-moving ripple of education and uplift. When asked what practices they see themselves carrying into other projects, the architects noted that lessons learned on this project made possible an LBC CORE-certified remodel of their own Iowa City office. They also point to the biophilia workshop, citing the practice as a source of inspiration on subsequent projects. "You can't unlearn things that you've learned," says Kahn.

Future hurdles? The notoriously difficult Materials petal. "It shouldn't be so hard to recycle!" says Obernolte.

But they hasten to add that an architect's job is to ask. "One of the most beautiful things about the Living Building Challenge is that it's less about these individual projects and more about transforming the industry," says Kent.

IN THE FIELD

College Community School District Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources Building

WORDS : ANDREW GLEESON **IMAGES** : ALEX MICHL, ASSOC. AIA **ARCHITECT** : OPN ARCHITECTS

This flexible classroom building is located on a former family farm and nestled between two beautifully restored historic white barns. It offers hands-on experience in agriculture, food, and natural resources (ANFR) for students seeking careers in the field, and it is the first building in the state specifically dedicated to vocational training in agriculture through the Career and Technical Education (CTE) program. This progressive and diversified approach to learning adds more options for students who are interested in careers that may not require a typical college degree.

Top left: Immediately west of the entrance is a large, flexible classroom, complete with mobile desks and two small garage doors that allow mechanical equipment to enter. This creates maximum configurability of the space for any anticipated lesson delivery. **Top right:** The super-graphic letters "AG" adorn the corrugated aluminum facade immediately adjacent to the main entrance and resemble seed seller advertising. **Bottom left and right:** A polycarbonate-clad greenhouse accommodates growing year-round and even has equipment for aquaponic planting. The slight northward shift of the greenhouse from the main facility allows a nice tumbling rhythm of gables as one looks west toward the barn.

A small tunnel under busy 76th Avenue connects the Cedar Rapids Prairie High School campus to its new Agricultural Classroom Building designed by OPN Architects. This flexible classroom building is located on a former family farm and nestled between two beautifully restored historic white barns. It offers hands-on experience in agriculture, food, and natural resources (ANFR) for students seeking careers in the field, and it is the first building in the state specifically dedicated to vocational training in agriculture through the Career and Technical Education (CTE) program. This progressive and diversified approach to learning adds more options for students who are interested in careers that may not require a typical college degree.

The modest gabled structure is instantly recognizable as a farm facility both in form and symbol. The super-graphic letters "AG" adorn the corrugated aluminum facade immediately adjacent to the main entrance and resemble seed seller advertising. The entrance lobby offers a through-view to an active cornfield (part of the 600-acre master-planned site) and hosts an impressive wood slat wall reminiscent of historic corn crib facades. Immediately west of the entrance is a large, flexible classroom, complete with mobile desks and two small garage doors that allow mechanical equipment enter. This creates maximum configurability of the space for any anticipated lesson delivery. Rolling exterior perforated shutters over the south windows of the classroom block direct sunlight on hot days and cast dappled light indoors. On the north wall, three more massive windows afford a panorama of the nearby cornfield. The project architect, Joshua Moe, AIA, found these windows important for two reasons: not only to connect the classroom directly to agricultural practice, but also to give the students a vista for daydreaming.

The bright and airy classroom is vaulted with white painted exposed structure and mechanical ducts. Unadorned plywood provides a splash of warm color framing the windows. East of the entrance, there is a concrete tornado shelter with additional collaboration spaces and restrooms. Immediately beyond the storm shelter, a polycarbonate-clad greenhouse accommodates growing year-round and even has equipment for aquaponic planting. The slight northward shift of the greenhouse from the main facility allows a nice tumbling rhythm of gables as one looks west toward the barn. This subtle movement integrates the new structure into the preexisting ensemble of old farm buildings. Although modest in means, the building hosts many such small moments of delight. One other serendipitous moment occurred with the polished concrete floors of the classroom: The contractor poured the concrete in the fall and forgot to properly cover it. The next morning, they found hundreds of maple leaves had fallen onto the still-drying concrete, impressing their form into the surface. At first, this seemed like a major mistake that may require a total repour, but the client loved the unique stamp the leaves made, so they kept it—an unscripted moment of architectural wonder and yet another opportunity for students to daydream.

Above: A calm and beautiful design that reflected Montessori principles was central to the conception of JouJou.

JOUJOU

PEACEFUL PLAY IN A PREPARED ENVIRONMENT

WORDS: STEVE MILLER, AIA **IMAGES**: CAMERON CAMPBELL, AIA, INTEGRATED STUDIO **ARCHITECT**: MA ARCHITECTURE

Stepping off the busy street into JouJou—an indoor play space nestled into 2,600 square feet of a former historic grocery store—is like releasing a calming breath. That, like every detail in the space, is an intentional choice by owners Jenny Krause Johnson and Amanda Wiebers, two women with young families in Des Moines.

Johnson and Wiebers realized there was a missing niche in child play—specifically play places geared toward children ages 2 and under. "Both of our youngest children were 3 when we started building, and it was mostly what we would have wanted for our families. If we both wanted the same things, we assumed that other families also want it, so let's build it," Johnson recalls. They wanted a space that met families' emotional needs and provided a network of support.

A calm and beautiful design that reflected Montessori principles was central to the conception of JouJou. The owners had a mutual friend, Alex Haeberle of Piggott, who recommended Anna Squier, AIA, of MA Architecture. When they met, Squier had an 18-month-old and was pregnant, so she felt like a natural fit for the team. Wiebers described the process as a "collaborative effort between the four of us," where they worked together closely, each bringing their experiences as parents to inform design decisions.

Johnson experienced postpartum anxiety and learned a lot about how different spaces impacted her well-being when she was a new parent. The ability to have good sightlines to see across the space was non-negotiable, so play spaces are divided by half-height pony walls that allow daylight deep into the space and maintain the ability for parents to keep an eye on their children as they are playing independently.

The Montessori method values creating independent children and creating a "prepared environment," where everything has a

Above: The ability to have good sightlines to see across the space was non-negotiable, so play spaces are divided by half-height pony walls that allow daylight deep into the space and maintain the ability for parents to keep an eye on their children as they are playing independently. **At right:** With custom acoustic felt panels and colorful murals complementing the suffusive use of white birch in the millwork, furniture, and toys, the space embodies the JouJou brand of intentionality and purposeful play in a prepared environment.

purpose and a place and is designed to be open and accessible. JouJou incorporates this philosophy by providing child-sized furniture and step stools to allow children to access the space with as little adult interference as possible. The owners describe how "there are a lot of ways in which our society doesn't treat children in a respectful way. Our underlying mission was to create a space that feels like a 'yes' space for children as well as a space that adults feel good going into and they want to return to."

As a startup business, costs had to be kept down. At "about $80 per square foot … we needed to be considerate and efficient with how money was spent by reducing to the essentials, while also being supportive of the JouJou brand through thoughtful implementation of colors, graphics, etc.," Squier says. This restraint and deft design touch are seen in every detail. The original pressed metal ceiling and exterior brick walls were exposed and repaired, highlighting the building's history. With custom acoustic felt panels and colorful murals complementing the suffusive use of white birch in the millwork, furniture, and toys, the space embodies the JouJou brand of intentionality and purposeful play in a prepared environment.

Reflecting on the process, Squier says, "The greatest joy was being able to use the space as a parent myself—to bring my two kids (18 months and 4 years old) and see them experience the space. I personally have been able to witness how the space supports intentional play, connectedness, early education, and community. Seeing the positive impact the space has had on our local community is powerful."

Above: The Montessori method values creating independent children and creating a "prepared environment" where everything has a purpose and a place and is designed to be open and accessible. JouJou incorporates this philosophy by providing child-sized furniture and step stools to allow children to access the space with as little adult interference as possible.

project credits

MidAmerican Energy Company Training Center for Excellence
Architect: INVISION
Location: Adel, Iowa
Civil Engineer: Bishop Engineering
Contractor: Hansen Company Inc.
Landscape Architect: Bishop Engineering
MEP Engineer: IMEG Corp.
Photographer: Cameron Campbell, AIA, Integrated Studio
Structural Engineer: Raker Rhodes Engineering LLC

Greene County High School
Architect: OPN Architects Inc.
Location: Jefferson, Iowa
Acoustic Design: Threshold Consultants
Civil Engineer: Bolton & Menk
Contractor: Henkel Construction
MEP Engineer: MODUS
Structural Engineer: IMEG
Theater Planning: Schuler Shook

Stanley Center for Peace and Security
Architect: Neumann Monson Architects
Location: Muscatine, Iowa
Contractor: Graham Construction
Environmental Consultants: Biohabitats and ECT Integrated Eco Strategy
MEPT Engineer: Design Engineers
Photographer: Cameron Campbell, AIA, Integrated Studio
Structural Engineer: Raker Rhodes Engineering LLC

College Community Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources Building
Architect: OPN Architects Inc.
Location: Cedar Rapids, Iowa
Civil Engineer: Hall & Hall
Contractor: Peak Construction
MEP Engineer: Design Engineers
Photographer: Alex Michl, Assoc. AIA
Structural Engineer: Raker Rhodes

JouJou
Architect: MA Architecture
Location: Des Moines, Iowa
Contractor: Bryan Edwards
Engineer: Durantem
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