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editor's letter

Welcome!

These days, just safely meeting with people has changed acutely due to the ongoing SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. In fact, on March 12 when the editorial board met to select projects for this issue, we were informed it would be the last in-person meeting at the Center for Architecture indefinitely. The next Tuesday I began working from home. While I am thankful for virtual tools, I must admit I often miss the full breadth of human interaction.

This issue showcases projects that mindfully support, elevate, and inspire our human condition. The irony of the timing and bittersweetness of the moment is not lost on me. How can the spaces we occupy foster a better environment in which to grow and thrive? How do views, daylight, and social connectedness enhance other aspects of a building’s program and purpose, all while putting the wellbeing of its inhabitants first?

Places meant for essential patient support—an ambulance emergency rescue and two outpatient facilities—may go further by introducing a rooftop or courtyard spaces. A building for physical exercise can be tailored to the needs of its rural community.

Spaces for spiritual exploration may express fellowship ranging from the organic to the pragmatic.

The architecture featured here demonstrates the connection between our shared environment and our personal wellbeing. We need helpers, hope, and healing even more than usual—this summer is a good moment to pause and appreciate the teams that make that work possible.

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People's Choice Awards

The AIA Iowa’s annual award program gives the public an opportunity to vote for their favorite local architecture

WORDS: KATHRIN HEALY

In celebration of Architecture Month, the American Institute of Architects, Iowa Chapter (AIA Iowa) hosted its annual People's Choice Awards program in April. The awards program encourages member firms to submit projects from across the state to be juried by the public throughout the month. On average, more than 600,000 votes are cast annually and all winning projects are announced online at iowaarchitecture.org.

"The biggest value of the People's Choice Awards Program is giving the general public, or people not regularly familiar with, exposure to architecture in Iowa," says Joe Wallace, AIA, architect at OPN Architects and co-chair of the AIA Iowa public relations committee. “It is a chance for family and friends to share excitement and ownership of a project they are passionate about. For the participating firms, People’s Choice is an opportunity to contribute work that might not otherwise go to an awards jury to be recognized for their impact on the community. Community focus and generating excitement for architecture in Iowa—that is what Architecture Month is all about."

AIA Iowa would like to extend its thanks to all firms who submitted to the awards program and all individuals who participated in voting. We encourage all participants to submit and vote again next year. View this year’s winners here.

1ST PLACE

LESTER BURESH FAMILY COMMUNITY WELLNESS CENTER

ARCHITECT: OPN ARCHITECTS
LOCATION: MOUNT VERNON, IOWA
2ND PLACE
UNITED TOWNSHIP
HIGH SCHOOL
ARCHITECT: OPN ARCHITECTS
LOCATION: EAST MOLINE, ILLINOIS

3RD PLACE
UNIVERSITY OF IOWA - COLLEGE OF PHARMACY
ARCHITECT: OPN ARCHITECTS
LOCATION: IOWA CITY, IOWA
ARCHITECTS TRAINED TO RESPOND IN TIMES OF NEED

AIA Iowa members are trained annually for the Disaster Assistance Team in partnership with the Iowa Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management

WORDS: KATHRIN HEALY

The American Institute of Architects, Iowa Chapter (AIA Iowa) leadership has entered into partnership with the Iowa Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (Iowa HSEMD) through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for a trained specialty team of Iowa architects. Signed on March 3, 2020, the MOU between AIA Iowa and the Iowa HSEMD allows trained volunteers-members of AIA Iowa-to deploy to disaster locations and perform building inspections that can help ensure the safety of Iowa citizens in areas impacted by natural disasters.

The agreement outlines the responsibilities of AIA Iowa and Iowa HSEMD to deploy the specialty team in times of a local emergency or disaster, formalizes the approval of the Iowa HSEMD and support for the specialty team and its deployment, describes the minimum standards for the team and how it will be maintained and deployed—including how the team will be created and submitted to Iowa HSEMD—and sets out the terms and conditions dealing with the activation, deployment, and operation of the specialty team.

“The American Institute of Architects, Iowa Chapter is thrilled to partner with the Iowa Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management to provide a specialty team in times of disasters,” says Jessica Reinert, Hon. AIA Iowa, executive director of AIA Iowa. “Architects from across the state of Iowa have stepped up to volunteer to be a part of a specialty team that is trained and ready to deploy to disaster zones across Iowa when the need occurs. This partnership gives our members a unique opportunity to serve the public while supporting our organization’s mission: to advocate for the health and safety of the public.”

“Signing the MOU with the Department of Homeland Security has formalized the relationship between local government authorities and the AIA Iowa Disaster Assistance Program run in the state by AIA Iowa,” says Jason Kruse, AIA, architect with BNIM and co-chair of the Disaster Assistance Committee. “Having the MOU will further allow our program to utilize the training and also allow our AIA members to obtain continuing education units while helping the community. Implementation of all this will assist in the safety assessment of affected structures while expediting the usage of the building following the disaster event.”

As of March 4, 2020, AIA Iowa has 26 fully trained and certified volunteers on the specialty team who are authorized to deploy to disaster zones when the need arises. This specialty team is ready to deploy during any governor-declared disaster in the state and can be deployed by written activation order from the Iowa HSEMD. AIA Iowa is proud of this partnership and our members who are so willing to lend a hand in times of emergency.

The AIA Iowa Disaster Assistance Committee provides members with a disaster assistance resource kit and leads training programs for the disaster response team, including a new virtual renewal program. AIA Iowa members must complete the full day of training once every five years and complete the virtual renewal program and pass the renewal test every two years to remain an active member of the disaster assistance team.

“AIA Iowa is proud to be the basis for support of the Iowa Disaster Assistance Program and to now have a formal Memorandum of Understanding with the Iowa Department of Homeland Security,” says Tom Hurd, AIA, founder of Spatial Designs Architects and Consultants. Hurd serves as advisor to the AIA Iowa Disaster Assistance Committee and is the former chair of the AIA Disaster Assistance Committee. “If we never have to use it because we don’t have a disaster, that is fine too. As we can see in these trying times, it is better to use our skills and be prepared so we can act quickly and decisively if needed.”
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Years of Membership

Long-term AIA Iowa members recognized for commitment to the chapter

At its annual spring conference, the American Institute of Architects, Iowa Chapter (AIA Iowa) recognizes members who have been committed to the chapter for various milestone years, starting at 25 and going up to 60 years of membership or more. Every year’s recognition is special to AIA Iowa and 2020 was no different: 34 members received Years of Membership certificates and recognition at our virtual spring conference held April 1.

James E. Grisolano, AIA, received his certificate for 50 years of Membership in 2020. “It has been my pleasure and distinct honor to be associated with this prestigious organization,” says Grisolano, an emeritus member.

Thank you and congratulations to each recipient for their continued membership with the chapter.
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Collaboratively operated between Mercy Medical Center Dubuque and Medical Associates, the new Mercy Dubuque Cancer Center will be an opportunity to provide the citizens of Dubuque and surrounding communities with complete and coordinated cancer services currently unavailable locally. OPN Architects and Altus Architectural Studios partnered with Mercy and Medical Associates to determine the feasibility of a regionally prominent cancer center. Led by the precepts that the center would be patient-centered, the design team worked with the client to define key programmatic components, partnership options, location options, costs, and financial feasibility. Following the study, the team was commissioned to design a new full-service cancer center offering medical oncology, radiation oncology, and holistic care, with support from nurse navigators, pharmacists, dietitians, and spiritual and social workers.

Located at the center of the revitalization of downtown Bettendorf, this four-story, 65,000-square-foot mixed-use building will become the anchor of the neighborhood and the western gateway of the new I-74 bridge. The building will house a mix of office and retail spaces, and will be composed of a steel frame with composite decking, expansive curtain walls, metal panels, and ebony brick.
ARTEX KITCHEN COLLECTION, DESIGN POLIFORM.

Poliform
This article is the second installment in a three-part series. In 1969, Iowa Architect highlighted ongoing warnings from nature with a cover story by Jim Wilkins titled Environment: Involvement. His article posed three questions that we are re-asking today: What is the level of concern? What really is the state of the environment? How can we be most effective?

In the last issue, we explored what our profession’s level of concern is. In this piece, we will address how the environment operates at scales varying from global to local. To do so, we acknowledge how systems—such as climate, watershed, and atmosphere—are all intertwined.

What really is the state of the environment: what is measurable vs. identifiable?

In 1969 Wilkins pondered “what is the thread tying these problem-elements together? Admittedly the thread is, in some cases, tenuous; the relationship is hard to see, but I believe it is there.” Today, the “thread” is not tenuous, and it’s global. Scientific consensus tells us the threat is an imbalance in greenhouse gases driven by human actions: carbon dioxide emissions from burning fossil fuels, nitrous oxide used in agriculture, methane released from oil and gas extraction as well as livestock production, and changes in atmospheric particles and pollutants.

“We now exert a dominant influence on the climate and environment. If we don’t quit burning fossil fuels, the effects will be catastrophic,” writes Edward Mazria, FAIA, in an article titled “It’s Time to Quit: A Call to Action on Climate, Carbon, and the Built Environment” on Architect magazine’s website. Therefore, decarbonization is the focus of Architecture 2030. Our built environment is responsible for roughly 40 percent of global carbon emissions, with transportation and industry coming in second and third, respectively, according to the United Nations Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction. Unfortunately, this industry’s piece of the pie continues to grow as demand for added space outpaces population growth, which in turn drives greater energy use and emissions. This is compounded by an increased need for cooling due to global warming.

To quantify this, the United Nations Environment Programme’s 10th Emissions Gap Report shows annual global greenhouse gas emissions are 55.3 gigatons carbon equivalent (gigatons translates to billions of metric tons). To limit global warming to the 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) established in the 2016 Paris Agreement, we need to cut emissions to 45 gigatons carbon equivalent, or roughly 80 percent of current levels. We need to work together to turn the tide—a sea change that is anything but easy. We can do it together. We must.

Above: Flooding of an Iowa field. Photo courtesy of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.
Climate Agreement, emissions must be reduced to 41 gigatons. This means emissions would need to be reduced by 25 percent by 2030, directly in conflict with our current pace.

As we know, this has outcomes. "What happens in the Arctic does not stay in the Arctic" is a rallying cry within the scientific community. The story can be told with satellite imagery or data measuring millions of kilometers of lost ice. The Arctic has been warming twice as fast as the global average, meaning sea level rise and continued warming are headed our way.

This supports the notion that what happens upstream has downstream effects. As sea levels rise and natural disasters become more devastating, the loss of all forms of life and property continues to be staggering. In Iowa, far from the coasts, we're no strangers to this phenomenon with an increased frequency and intensity of flooding. So, what is the state of our state? Iowa has one of the most altered landscapes on the earth, with 92 percent of the landscape being cultivated farmland. Most agricultural soil hosts row crops. Increasingly, wind turbines rise from the horizon. Both food production and clean energy serve basic human needs, yet Iowa's environmental landscape is a contradictory one.

Agricultural use of nitrous oxide accounts for roughly 80 percent of U.S. emissions of this type, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Like other greenhouse gases, nitrous oxide can remain in the atmosphere for more than a century, however the effect of it is 300 times more concentrated than carbon dioxide. This impact is felt in the atmosphere and in waterways such as the Mississippi River Watershed—within which Iowa is situated—where runoff contributes to the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico. To filter nitrates, some municipalities in Iowa must bear the costs associated with improving water treatment infrastructure to ensure clean drinking water.

But the news is not all bad. We now have cleaner air in Iowa than we did in the '70s and much of this is due to policy and innovation. The phrase “think globally, act locally” that emerged in the 1970s among environmentalists remains in style today. In 2016, according to the Iowa Environmental Council, Iowa became the first state to generate more than 30 percent (36 percent that year, in fact) of its energy from wind and the forecast is for more.

With this abundance of information, what is to be done can seem overwhelming and unclear. Identifying issues can be the start of reverse engineering solutions. Extreme weather influences land use and building design. According to the AIA, "resilient and adaptable buildings are a community's first line of defense against disasters and changing conditions of life and property." Ultimately, the relationship is cyclical because building design also influences emissions. Join us in the fall issue as we unpack our third question of the series: How can we be most effective?
A NEW CENTURY OF CARING

Two rural health care facilities take a modern approach to wellness, care, and community connection

WORDS: KELLY ROBERSON
IMAGES: CAMERON CAMPBELL, AIA, INTEGRATED STUDIO
ARCHITECT: INVISION
The commonalities of health care facilities lead to their anonymity: Warrens of hallways, little to no natural light, confusing signage. Institutions such as these are supposed to be sterile, and their design often reflects it.

But like most things, health care has changed. There are wellness clinics and tele-medicine, integrative approaches and same-day surgeries. Fortunately, health care architecture is catching up, especially in the design of two buildings—one in Nevada and the other in Independence—by INVISION.

The two facilities—both outpatient unit expansions—were created for two different entities and are separated by about an hour and a half of road time. But they share similar purposes, says Jason DeVries, AIA, senior associate with INVISION. Both offer services for rural critical access hospitals and both replace buildings that had, shall we say, outlived their design usefulness. Both were used to re-orient the public’s perspective of entry to and use of a health care facility in a way that’s reinvigorating, not just for the clinics themselves but for the communities at large.

**Let There Be Light**

The 62,800-square-foot outpatient facility in Independence was the first to be designed and was intended to replace a 1960s structure. It also needed to provide space for a non-affiliated primary care clinic in order to centralize locations and reduce both patient and staffing inefficiencies, a key component to helping rural areas in particular maintain access to a range of health care, says DeVries. “During the discovery process, before we put pen to paper, we wanted to find out what they wanted from this facility,” he says. “Therapy and wellness for the community were big drivers for the project, and everything about the design had a connection to nature and daylight as its underlying purpose.”

That becomes immediately apparent in the entry, a two-story, zinc glass- and ipe wood-clad volume that replaced a really undistinguished PVC lattice canopy. “No one from the community knew where to enter,” DeVries says.

It did, however, have a small space centered around a donated tree that people gathered around, and INVISION kept that as the focal point of a new courtyard, a small zen-like space where the staff has an all-hands meeting every morning. The new entry and exterior materiality recall the rural context of the surrounding

**Top & bottom left:** Two exterior views of the facility in Independence; the emphasis on light and connection to the outdoors is clearly evident with a preponderance of windows and wood siding that mimics rural buildings in the surrounding environs. **Bottom right:** Natural light bounces off reflective surfaces for a patient and staff experience that’s much different from cramped, dark structures of a few decades ago.
area—horizontal wood cladding, an allusion to barn cladding, says DeVries, that offers warmth but is incredibly durable.

Wellness remained a clear driver for the project, even up to “hiding” where the elevators are. “The elevator shaft isn’t easily seen—it faces the bathrooms around a corner—while the stair is highlighted in a grand 30-foot-tall lobby,” says DeVries. “We celebrated that concept and it was an idea prevalent across the whole project.”

Daylighting offered an organizing principle too, with two-story high windows and clerestory options creating a lovely rhythm to the interior spaces. “The whole south side is glass, and there’s glass around the top two feet of every exam room—a concerted effort by us to get as much daylight into these spaces as possible,” says DeVries.

Wood cladding repeats on interior spaces, complementing travertine tile, to create visual identification cues for building users. In addition, the second floor—leased to a primary care practice—shifts forward on the building’s horizontal access in order to shield the entrance to the main building.

**Views In, Views Out**

As with the Independence clinic, the decidedly rural context of the 35,600-square-foot Nevada facility—bordering a corn field in Story County—inspired its materiality.

Operators of the Nevada facility were originally running two sites, one in town and one on the periphery of the community. Again, inefficiencies and duplication as well as creating centrality would prove key to the viability of the decision to revamp the latter location, as would expanded square footage for outpatient services that were limited by the existing facilities. “This is close to both Ames and Nevada, and a lot of community members were traveling to get to a more regional hospital,” says DeVries. “They wanted folks to stay in town and come to this facility instead.”

INVISION began by reframing the entry with a new addition that includes a porte-cochère that covers a drop-off area. “The previous facility was built in 2008 but there wasn’t a lot of love lost when they elected to cover it up. There was new leadership and they had been thrust into a facility that was poorly designed and outdated. The leadership team was ready for a change and wanted to build some excitement,” says DeVries.

From the exterior, there are two distinct material palettes. Wood clads the wellness areas, with gym space open to the community after hours. “That needed to be very approachable so people felt comfortable coming to that facility and working out,” he says.

Alternatively, the back side, clad in flax-hued terra cotta, contains the clinical components, and that’s also where some interesting articulations of materiality lie. In place of solid doors and neutral hues, INVISION created an onstage-offstage model, with clerestory windows and two glass doors in and out of each clinical pod. The striped glass filters light into clinical staff areas and patient corridors, while exam rooms are fully shielded from view—a design choice that helped to organize and streamline operations.

“A patient checks in and is escorted into a room where they fill out paperwork, and from there is transported to wherever they need to go for the day,” says DeVries. “The harvested light we capture bounces around on the travertine floors and back into rooms, and really highlights the strong connection between nature and healing.”

In addition to light, the renovated facility made bold, thoroughly modern use of colors and imagery to create intuitive wayfinding. Three hues and large-scale graphics highlight patient destinations, especially helpful for an older population, and direct connections—east to west, north to south—create a simplified traffic pattern for outpatient services and ambulatory care.

Views out also become views in. “There’s also an effort from the hospital to highlight people working out to those driving by,” says DeVries. “It helps promote wellness to the broader community, not just the facility itself. It’s a way for the hospital to engage with the community.”
The exterior of the Nevada facility clearly delineates forms, with clinical components clad in a more neutral hue. 

**Top left:** A gym space is open to the community for after-hours use. 

**Top right:** Imagery and repeating colors provide strong visual wayfinding cues for visitors. 

**Middle right:** A new addition frames the entrance and creates a central point of entry. 

**Bottom right:** Common-use spaces in the facility also repeat the colors and bold imagery of the rest of the building for a cohesive design. 

**Bottom left:** Glass-panel doors slide open to reveal intake rooms.
When Lutheran Church of Hope builds out a new location, they don’t just plan for their current members—they plan for the future. “They’ve got a big following and grow like no other church you’ve seen,” says architect Dana Sorensen, AIA, who worked on the church’s new Grimes location through BNIM’s Des Moines office. “We knew they would grow to more than 500 people per service.”

With that in mind, the BNIM team knew they had to give the congregation plenty of space to grow, gather, and build community within the church building, which was completed in 2018. “The committee we worked with really wanted this to be different from other churches,” says BNIM principal Kevin Nordmeyer, AIA. “They have the opposite of the attitude churches have had, historically. Instead of being inwardly focused, they’re focused on making this place an intentional space to stay connected with the neighborhood and make people feel welcome.”

Nordmeyer, who has been a Hope member for more than 20 years, says his team pulled inspiration from a phrase frequently used by Mike Housholder, the senior pastor at the church. “He says, ‘We worship God, not tradition,’” Nordmeyer says. “He wants the church buildings to speak to the qualities of engagement and transparency, not just look like a church because that’s what churches should look like.”

BNIM architect Kayla Berkson, AIA, says it’s this community-focused tenet that guided the team’s design decisions in both the
larger fellowship space—which was built with future expansion in mind—and the single-story entryway. A wealth of windows and skylights throughout both volumes offer sweeping views and a feeling of connectedness to outside surroundings. “Because it was one of the first buildings to go up in the new development, there was a really conscious effort to make sure the building felt welcoming,” Berkson says, noting that even corridors and stairwells are flooded with daylight. “We didn’t want anywhere to feel like a church basement. Short of restrooms and the mother’s room, you can see into every space.”

But even with firm guiding principles in place, the project wasn’t without challenges. Because it was located in a new development, neighborhood covenants meant design choices were limited. First, color and style regulations forced the team to think outside the box. “They wanted a craftsman feel to the building, which brought forth a lot of material and form restriction,” says Sorensen. “Most of our design work is contemporary in form, so we had to think about how to take something we’d normally do and make it fit into this context.”

To lend a craftsman appearance to the building, which still embodies somewhat of a modern silhouette, the team chose a warm terra cotta tile for the exterior. It was a smart design choice, but given the fact that the team was working within a church budget, it was an economical one, too. “It looks like a really nice building,” says Sorensen. “But we did have to get creative with where our dollars were spent. Terra cotta tile is actually quite affordable and allowed for a maximum impact within the budget.”

“The terra cotta tile wasn’t originally a consideration,” says Nordmeyer. “We wouldn’t have considered it had it not been for the style and color requirements, but the Shaker style works really nicely with the development and allowed for a more modern shape.”

Another restriction the team faced was a gabled roof covenant, which required a roof slope of at least 50 percent. The team fulfilled this request with a unique solution—pushing the peak to one side to manipulate the mass of the roof. “It gave it an interesting play on proportion,” says Sorensen, “but still existed within the traditional, typical gabled form.”

Lastly, a maximum-height covenant meant the team had to put a cap on how they built vertically. “We did have a walkout basement, but we were able to measure the maximum height from the upper level and not the lower level,” says Nordmeyer, who notes that the tallest structure on the property is a 50-foot cross that marks the entrance to the church. “They never challenged that, but it could have been interpreted differently.”

Opposite: A modest single-story entrance offers a warm “front porch” with cedar panels and a dramatic cantilevered overhang. Top: Built into the side of a hill, the church features a walk-out basement that faces an informal outdoor worship space and a regional stormwater pond stocked with fish. Middle: Clad in economical terra cotta tiles, the lower mass offers a wealth of flexible fellowship space while adhering to the church’s budget. Bottom: Walls of glass surround the structure. “There was a really conscious effort to make sure the building felt welcoming and had a visual transparency that would invite community members inside,” says Kayla Berkson, AIA, BNIM architect.
Once the team overcame each of the development restrictions, they were left with a creative use of three spaces. Below the larger gathering space, a walk-out level houses offices, a nursery, classrooms, and restrooms. A single-story entry, deemed the “front porch” by the BNIM team, offers a space for gathering and education. And a third element, the cross, anchors the property. “As the church grows over time, the cross will become a marker for the main entrance and the center of the building,” says Nordmeyer.

While working with strict development restrictions can be an uphill battle, the BNIM team took it in stride. “The covenants that were in place really forced us to take a step back from our usual approach and think in a creative way,” says Berkson. “I’m really proud of the way our team overcame various challenges and helped people understand there’s more than one way to think about something.”

Sorensen says that even with the covenants in mind, his team never lost sight of their true goal: making the church a place that could grow and expand to accommodate a growing congregation. “This project was seen as the first stepping-off point to the next project,” he says. “In the future, the large worship space will operate as more of a connection and gathering space, so we created it to eventually operate as that connective tissue.”

Nordmeyer says it’s this fellowship-first mentality and the understated elegance that accompanies it that makes him proud. “The building isn’t trying to be anything more than it is,” he says. “It’s pretty humble, which just highlights the true purpose of the space: making connections.”

Top: The two masses overlap in a corridor that runs through the center of the complex. Floor-to-ceiling windows allow light to pour into the hallway. Bottom left: Instead of building a traditional worship space, the BNIM team decided early on that the large hall would be a fellowship space first—but one that could also be used for worship. “It was a major distinction of this church,” says BNIM principal Kevin Nordmeyer. Bottom right: From the outside in, the church is anything but traditional—a direct reflection of the organization’s ethos. They speak more to connection to community rather than tradition or history,” says Nordmeyer, AIA.
"A beautiful, comfortable, calm, quiet healing environment which affords privacy and dignity to patients, families and staff"

-Health Center Patient
The new Johnson County Ambulance Service and Medical Examiner Facility is an oasis amid the everyday world

When designing the Johnson County Ambulance Service and Medical Examiner Facility, OPN Architects' goal was to provide a new space to relax and recharge for the individuals who serve the community. The facility was long overdue for an upgrade as they had outgrown the mere 3,600 square feet of their prior location. While the new facility is significantly larger—38,000 square feet total—the greatest accomplishment of this project was the design team's ability to create an oasis amid the everyday world.

"The project reclaimed an underutilized piece of land adjacent to other county buildings," says Justin Bishop, AIA, associate principal at OPN Architects. Located across the street from a parking lot, convenience store, and storage facility, the Ambulance Service and Medical Examiner Facility visually protrudes from fellow utilitarian buildings.

The material palette of the exterior incorporates vibrant wood panels and muted grey stones, creating a sleek facade. Detailed glass panels between each glass overhead door create a single glass pane, maximizing the transparency of the ambulance bays. In the previous facility, few ambulances even fit in their bays. To combat this spatial issue, the new facility was designed with higher bays and dedicated storage was created to improve ambulance services.

"Biophilic elements such as the incorporation of natural materials, a connection to the outdoors, and use of color all played an important role in the design to impact productivity, mood, health, and wellbeing," explains David Sorg, AIA, principal at OPN Architects.

Lush foliage outside inspired the shades of green carried throughout the space, from the chartreuse color of the stairway to the vibrant sedum flowers located on the rooftop workspace. Reclaimed wood anchors the interior and provides warmth to the exterior.
Sustainability was an important element in the new facility. "With some areas consuming more energy than others, the overall design had to compensate through extra energy efficiency strategies, such as radiant in-floor heat, enhanced building envelope assemblies, and deliberate lighting strategies," says Bishop.

As a result of these strategies, the building operates at 70 percent better than code and was recognized as the most energy-efficient building participating in the utility incentive rebate program in the state of Iowa in 2018.

"A space designed for first responders and other essential county service employees needed to be functional while also elevating the experience of the individuals who serve our community," says Bishop.

By prioritizing design elements that can help mitigate health risks common to first responders, OPN Architects was able to create a functional environment that can serve as a retreat. "With the glass overhead doors and glass jamb panels, transparency is maximized from both the public perspective by seeing into the bays and the users, connecting to their context while receiving an abundance of natural light," says Sorge. "There is something powerful about the community seeing the ambulances and first responders protecting and serving their neighborhood."

Opposite: The new ambulance bays provide complete transparency to passersby with floor-to-ceiling windows between each glass panel door. Top right: Three ambulances were too tall to fit in the former facility. Higher bays now allow for varying vehicle sizes. Bottom right, bottom left, & top left: Vibrant shades of green are carried throughout the interior, connecting the indoor spaces with the rooftop workspace.
Top right: Tall exterior windows provide an abundance of natural light in the new facility. Bottom: Natural elements, such as reclaimed wood and lush foliage, decorate the exterior. Top left: The new facility has ample room for first responders to find quiet corners for relaxation.
INSPIRATIONAL WORKPLACE DESIGN

FEDERAL HOME LOAN BANK

substance architecture
DES MOINES IOWA
Tall steeples and spires peak skylines, marking places of worship the world over. While some religious expressions reach high to the heavens, the Unitarian Universalists stick to the ground. Completed in 2017, the Unitarian Universalist Society of Iowa City’s (UUSIC) new facility on a small acreage in Coralville is no typical place of worship.

The UUSIC housed services in a historic brick building on a downtown Iowa City street for more than a century. Though the congregation had strong attachments to their little brick home, the structure left plenty to desire. The fellowship was growing, for one, and the existing space simply couldn’t support the numbers. Accessibility and environmental impact—two of seven main tenants in the religion—presented major issues. Members dreamed of room for educational classes and outdoor spaces.

“The congregation had been struggling with their existing facility for many, many years,” says David Zahradnik, AIA, principal at Neumann Monson Architects. Zahradnik first explored possible project plans with UUSIC in the 1990s. For more than two decades, the congregation considered renovation and relocation options, but nothing held traction—until 2013, when a member’s generous donation catalyzed a stalled-out conversation. With that, the congregation hired Neumann Monson Architects and got to work. After exploring various options, UUSIC purchased an 8.5-acre lot of woods and trails in Coralville.
Opposite: The seven glass bays of the facility call back to the seven main principles of the faith. Top left: Large expanses of glass line the exterior walls, ensuring a continual connection to the outdoors. Top right: The main congregation hall, which serves as a worship space and community gathering space, is outfitted with audiovisual technology for the hard of hearing. Bottom right: Simple and sustainable materials were used throughout the design, allowing nature to be the main focus. Bottom left: The new facility sits in a clearing on a small acreage. The congregation utilizes the natural spaces to further their education programs.
Above: The new facility is on track to be net-zero, the first of its kind in Iowa.

"[One of our tenants] is respect for the interdependent web of all of existence of which we are part. We're very connected to and respectful of nature," says Kirk Witzberger, UUSIC member who served as chair of the new facilities committee. "We wanted a building that was connected to nature as much as possible, that's why our windows start at the ground, because we wanted our existence in the building to feel like it continues to flow out into nature."

This connection to the outdoors is evident in nearly every aspect of the design. Western red cedar cladding, chosen for its sustainable production and natural wear, lines the ceiling throughout. In lieu of an ornate apse, a column of natural stone is the focal point behind the lecturn. And every design decision was made with one major goal at the forefront: to be the "greenest church in Iowa."

"At the beginning, we were trying to help them define what it meant," says Matt Krieger, AIA, project manager at Neumann Monson Architects. "We realized there are lots of churches that are LEED certified—we had done several of them in the state. What we found out was there weren't any net-zero churches in Iowa, and there was only one in the U.S. at the time we started."

Net-zero—a term used to describe buildings that create as much or more energy than they consume—efforts began before the project even broke ground. An existing house and metal shed on the site were carefully disassembled and all materials were either reused or donated. When choosing a location for the new building, the team went with the largest existing clearing in order to preserve woodlands. The project utilizes standard strategies, such as bioswales with native grasses, geothermal heating, and fully electric operations powered by solar arrays. And over more than two years of occupancy, the building has averaged 110 percent on-site energy production.

It was equally important for the new building to be accessible and welcoming to all. The entrance and thresholds throughout were leveled to allow for easier access. Gender neutral bathrooms and a listening system for the hard of hearing were incorporated as well. "What I appreciate about [the design team] is they did ask us about our principles and they designed that building in alignment," says Deb Schoelerman, UUSIC member who served on the new facilities committee. The large glass bays in the worship hall call back to these seven principles.

"I think the building is better than we initially imagined we could ever have," says Witzberger. "It exceeded what I thought was possible. I thought it was an incredible accomplishment."
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HEART & CENTER

A small-town wellness center stands out as a model for pragmatic design and holistic personal and community wellbeing.

WORDS: LEAH WALTERS  IMAGES: CAMERON CAMPBELL, AIA, INTEGRATED STUDIO  ARCHITECT: NEUMANN MONSON ARCHITECTS
Fifteen miles from Iowa City off a straight, flat stretch of Highway 22, Lone Tree sits on a mere 1.04 square miles of southeast Johnson County. This community boasts many small-town Iowa comforts—an annual fall festival, a coffee shop, and a local newspaper, for example—with quick access to amenities in its neighboring communities. But until recently, it didn’t have any of its own.

For years, a small group of residents advocated for a wellness center and gathering space. It wasn’t until the town’s only K-12 school determined a need for a new gymnasium that the idea gained traction. The Lone Tree Wellness Center came to life in summer 2018 as a joint effort between the city and school district to provide for the physical and social wellbeing of all residents.

When the school district pegged Neumann Monson Architects to lead the project, the team first had to flesh out the city’s and school’s priorities. A series of stakeholder meetings helped the team make sense of two separate, but agreeable, sets of needs, and devise a program and vision that suited the entire community. The design team was motivated by a drive to enhance Lone Tree citizens’ quality of life, but challenged by a small budget and footprint. Although maintained by the school, the building needed to serve the community. So we were intentional that the building stand alone and not look like or try to be a school

Opposite: Transparent materials give the center the effect of glowing after sundown and allow the community to visually connect with happenings inside. Top left: The building was laid out on a 10-foot module, which is visible from the exterior. Top right: Energetic pops of yellow and a symmetrical pair of staircases amplify the simplicity of the space. Bottom left: A raised-track offers a vantage point of the court below. Bottom right: Black steel and concrete dominate the straightforward materials palette.
facility,” says Nathan Griffith, AIA, who served as project manager.

Griffith describes the site as a post-stamp. It sits adjacent to the school and is accessible to students by a footpath from the existing gym.

“We were literally squeezing out all of the fat the whole way along, so we ended up with something very pragmatic,” says Griffith.

The wrestling and aerobics room is perched over the court and the entire gymnasium is encircled by a raised track, creating a sense of connection, both physically and visually.

“We tried to keep it simple and open so that the building could feel occupied by only a few people, which serves this idea of one big community room that you can go into and feel like you’re a part of something bigger,” says Griffith.

Materially, the building is simple. Black-painted steel frames the interior spaces and a mix of transparent and translucent panels flood the spaces with light during the day. From the outside, those panels give the community a glimpse inside and at night, whether the space is alive with a community meeting or basketball game, the facade is aglow giving passersby a sense of the action within.

“It's become almost a visual pulse of the life of the community,” says Griffith. Which is fitting of a building that quickly became the heart of Lone Tree. The center draws 300 active members from a 30-mile radius. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, seniors take a morning workout class. On school days at 12:50 p.m., students take over for PE. The Lions Club uses the community room on Wednesday evenings, and one morning a week the school superintendent hosts a coffee social.

This model of project delivery is being eyed by other municipalities. It’s proof that a small-town solution is capable of enhancing the physical and social wellness of residents and their community as a whole.

Top: Strategically placed glass washes wide open spaces with daylight. Middle: To get the most value out of the budget, materials were used efficiently and windows were placed only where they were needed. Bottom: Inside and out, everything aligns to the 10-foot module for clarity and simplicity.
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~ CARL ELEFANTE

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Collected

Lester Buresh Family Community Wellness Center | 08
Location: Mount Vernon, Iowa
Architect: OPN Architects
Contractor: Garling Construction
MEPT Engineer: Design Engineers
Photographer: Alex Michl, OPN Architects

United Township High School | 09
Location: East Moline, Ill.
Architect: OPN Architects
Construction Manager: Bush Construction
Civil Engineer: IMEG Engineering
MEPT Engineer: Design Engineers
Structural Engineer: Raker Rhodes
Photographer: Cameron Campbell, AIA, Integrated Studio

University of Iowa - College of Pharmacy | 09
Location: Iowa City, Iowa
Architect: OPN Architects
Contractor: Mirion
Photographer: Cameron Campbell, AIA, Integrated Studio

Features

Outpatient Unit Expansion - Independence | 18
Location: Independence, Iowa
Architect: INVtSION
Contractor: Larson Construction
Civil Engineer: Fehr Graham
Structural Engineer: Raker Rhodes Engineering
MEP Engineer: MODUS
Landscape Architect: Ritland + Kuiper
Photographer: Cameron Campbell, AIA, Integrated Studio

Outpatient Unit Expansion - Nevada | 20
Location: Nevada, Iowa
Architect: INVtSION
Contractor: Graham Construction
Civil Engineer: Bishop Engineering
MEP Engineer: MODUS
Structural Engineer: KJWW
Landscape Architect: Ritland + Kuiper
Photographer: Cameron Campbell, AIA, Integrated Studio

Lutheran Church of Hope | 22
Location: Grimes, Iowa
Architect: BNIM
Acoustical Consultant: C&C Consultants
Contractor: The Hansen Company, Inc.
Civil & Landscape Engineer: Civil Engineering Consultants
MEP Engineer: Morrissey Engineering
Structural Engineer: KPFF Consulting Engineers
Photographer: Nick Merrick, Hall + Merrick

Johnson County Ambulance Service | 26
Location: Iowa City, Iowa
Architect: OPN Architects
Contractor: Portzen Construction
Civil Engineer: HBK Engineering
MEP Engineer: Design Engineers
Structural Engineer: M2b Structural Engineers
Photographer: Wayne Johnson, Main Street Studio

Unitarian Universalist Society | 30
Architect: Neumann Monson Architects
A/V Consultant: Diversified Design
Acoustical Consultant: C&C Consultants
Contractor: McComas Lacina Construction
Civil Engineer: HBK Engineering
MEP Engineer: Design Engineers
Structural Engineer: Raker Rhodes
Photographer: Cameron Campbell, AIA, Integrated Studio

Lone Tree Wellness Center | 34
Location: Lone Tree, Iowa
Architect: Neumann Monson Architects
Contractor: McComas Lacina Construction
Civil Engineer: HBK Engineering
MEP Engineer: West Plains Engineering
Structural Engineer: Raker Rhodes
Photographer: Cameron Campbell, AIA, Integrated Studio
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