



From Eyesore To Asset

Sustainable community center didn't begin that way

Now or never” is how Becky Steinhoff describes the journey of taking an old, messy building with multiple challenges and turning it into a revitalized, beautiful community asset—the Goodman Community Center in Madison, Wis. “All of us like to go to places that make us feel good,” says Steinhoff, executive director of the new community center. “Our new building needed to be beautiful, not just functional.”

With the assistance of Wisconsin’s Focus on Energy Program and Eppstein Uhen Architects, the center held its grand opening on September 27, 2008, and breathed new life into the Madison community. The center is one of the busiest in the city, and features programming and activities addressing a variety of needs from preschoolers to adults. The

new building doubles the number of households that can be served to nearly 11,000. It brings to life a vision of a center connected to its diverse community, and is a shining beacon and source of pride for many.

Don't Judge A Building By Its Skin

Although the center is an inspiring example of a neighborhood and city coming together, it didn't always look that inviting. The building—now listed on the National Register of Historic Places—dates to 1903, when it served as a factory for agricultural-equipment production and structural-steel fabrication. Since the early 1980s, the building has been underutilized and ultimately uncoccupied. Finally, after much urging from the community to clean up the old site,

the center teamed with Eppstein Uhen Architects to take on the transformation and design process.

In the end, architects converted the historic building into a versatile, all-inclusive facility. This included a 35,000-square-foot renovation and a 12,000-square-foot gymnasium addition. The community center includes a public lobby, multiple public-meeting rooms, a fitness center, youth and senior spaces, a large food pantry, a commercial kitchen and a café with outdoor seating along a public bike bath.

The café—scheduled to open before the end of 2008—will be run by teens training in culinary arts. “Our kids, when they’re ready, will be running a restaurant and catering business that will be able to cater to events in the building as well as anywhere in the community,” Steinhoff

A look at the building, which is now on the National Register for Historic Places, before its renovation.



says. “It’s going to be high-end catering. It’s not going to be burgers and fries.” The teens debuted their emerging talents at the grand opening’s donors’ brunch, and are excited about the opportunities the program will give them.

Sustainable Programs, Sustainable Design

Developing an environment that will engage people from all walks of life, ages and backgrounds proved to be both a challenging and rewarding process. Incorporating sustainable design concepts was especially important to the community from the beginning. Architects worked to make the building as “green” as possible by re-using most of the iron-work’s elements, including the steel gantry outside and surplus structural-steel beams inside. Other features include a rain garden for on-site storm-water retention, native-plant selection, energy-efficient windows, recycled furnishings and innovative plumbing fixtures.

Energy conservation was also a focus. The long, narrow building had over 130 windows that needed to be replaced to comply with the National Park Service’s Historic Preservation Standards, and it was important to maintain the building’s sense of openness. To accomplish this, energy-recovery units were installed on the mechanical side—94-percent-efficient boilers and high-efficiency chillers for the building’s air-conditioning system. A solar hot-water heating system on the renovated gantry serves the kitchen and showers, while a photovoltaic solar electric system generates electricity to help with operational costs.

The project team worked with Wisconsin’s Focus on Energy Program, and received \$105,200 in incentives for incorporating the environmentally responsible systems, which helped on the payback side. Plus, as Steinhoff points out, “It [isn’t] going to be long before these types of green building practices are standard. We might as well start now. People are expecting it.”

Project Challenges

In addition to navigating sustainable design and working within the standards placed on historic buildings, the existing building and site presented a number of environmental challenges. Widespread contamination, dirt and grime plagued the building, including lead paint, low-level PCBs (toxic chemicals) and heavy metals in the soils. Severe maintenance issues

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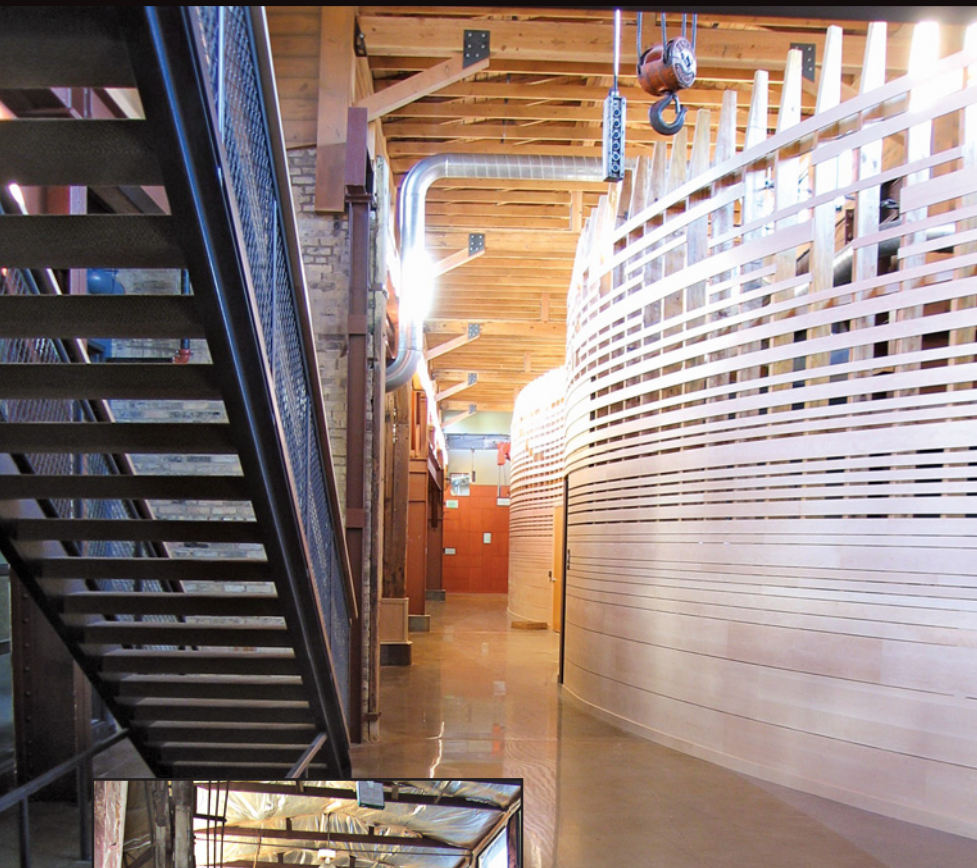
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(Top) Paint was removed from the inside brick walls by pressure-blasting them with crushed walnut shells.

(Left) A view of the corridor before the makeover.

were addressed immediately to stabilize the building. The roof structure, plumbing, electrical and fire-protection systems were inadequate for today's code standards, and the historic brick had been covered with an "insulcrete" exterior insulation product. After its removal, the brick was cleaned with a citrus-based solution and tuck-pointed. Replacement brick—where required—came from a demolished industrial building in Milwaukee from the same era. Inside, the wood structure was sandblasted. Paint was removed from the soft interior brick walls by pressure-blasting with crushed walnut shells, so as not to damage the surface. Basically, the building and site required extensive cleanup.

In addition, the long, narrow building

made for wonderful day lighting throughout, although it presented a design challenge because everything was laid out in a linear fashion. Typically, a community center benefits from a plan that radiates from a central gathering point. "We couldn't fight it, so we worked with the community to locate the best spaces for teenagers and youths, seniors and administration. There are general community-meeting rooms along the spine of the building with the large, open assembly spaces occupying the extreme ends and then connecting along the way," says Cliff Goodhart, project architect.

Today, it's hard to fathom the initial challenges presented by the project. The beautiful brick-and-wood structure, the great daylight, the restored structural gantry outside and overall site are clean and stunning. The center is situated along the city's bike path, and is in the heart of the neighborhood, making it truly accessible to a variety of area residents.

Tips For Others

The Goodman Community Center is a model for other communities and design processes, especially in terms of sustainable design. As Goodhart suggests, one has to make sure the sustainable ideas are in line with the users' priorities. "They wanted to be very sustainable, of course, but we had to make sure that we used the systems that would perform, have long-term benefit, and give the biggest bang for the buck." For example, fresh air and thermal comfort were a big concern, so a high-efficiency, variable-air volume system was incorporated. This sophisticated, modular system senses heating, cooling and exhaust requirements, and adjusts accordingly. "While we were somewhat restrained by the building's envelope, we were able to compensate by using the most-efficient systems."

Steinhoff admits that the costs involved with sustainable design presented a challenge. "How could we justify spending more?" The question was raised numerous times, so the team discussed how various design decisions would affect the end functionality.

Goodhart urges others to "seek out incentives from utilities, government agencies or banks that may assist in methods for paying back these more-expensive systems." In the case of the non-profit Goodman Center, new market, historic and energy tax credits were sold, which reduced payback times, and contributed to the bottom line. He also encourages people to use high-quality materials that, in the long term, will be more sustainable. "Their initial cost may be more, but a community center with its high level of use really mandates that durability be considered from the outset."

When questioned about her motivation to tackle this now-beautiful project, Steinhoff answers, "It felt like something that was doable. When looking at the schematics, people were saying, 'Wow, this is amazing!'" She's proud of how the community center has brought a diverse community together. Although she knows she'll be busy for quite some time with the new center, she's already eyeing an adjacent piece of property with the dream of one day opening a charter school. **PRB**