AIA Eastern Illinois Chapter

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C.W. AVERY FAMILY YMCA

Project Location: PLAINFIELD, ILLINOIS

Architect: HEALY, BENDER & ASSOCIATES, INC.

Owner: GREATER JOLIET AREA YMCA

Building Type: RECREATIONAL FACILITY

Project Description:

The new 57,000 square foot YMCA facility was a community effort in many ways. The challenge for everyone was to back up the owners' efforts and mission. The funding for the not for profit organization came from local donations. Community input and assistance led to the decision to site the building closer to the village center. The village, park district, school district and Provena St Joseph Medical Center developed agreements to share facilities. This created a number of interests to address through a YMCA building that will become a community center for the area.

The site's raised elevation allows passers-by a vantage of the entire facility and has made the building an instant landmark. The unique, playful, and contemporary façade makes that landmark status that much more memorable. Pre-cast concrete waves are seen cresting on the Natatorium wing of the building. Brick and stone pilasters break the long expanses into a reasonable and understandable rhythm with appropriate scale. This building may not be your parents' YMCA, but at the same time it still feels comfortable.

Colorful exposed steel lintels above the windows are an indication that this building is a serious place to play. Large translucent wall panels and windows with reflective glazing are aligned with sun patterns to allow the pool area to have natural day lighting while not adding a large heat load in the summer. Skylights and high windows keep the spaces illuminated throughout the day. A series of large round windows with a timber trellis above creates an outdoor transition space to the campus/ park setting beyond. Glass and light have been used as effective interior and exterior emotive devices.

The program developed as the needs of the building became apparent. Meeting rooms, a supervised children's playground, and a game room/ teen center were important to meeting the needs of the community and attract a diverse population. YMCA programs vary from pre-school programs to Pilates to over 50 sports leagues. The building had to be designed with that kind of flexibility in mind. One of the primary purposes of the YMCA is to provide exercise facilities. This facility has a competition style pool, basketball courts with indoor track, a fitness room, generous family changing space, and an aerobics/ dance studio.

The interior finishes compliment the playful mood created by the exterior. Color and form are an important part of the wayfinding in the building. Primary colors provide a simple color scheme, while the use of variations of these basic colors adds complexity to the palette. Winding, colorful forms within the floor, ceiling, and furniture lead people in different directions from the central node. Interior glazing make spaces accessible both visually and emotionally. This helps the staff to build a sense of openness and trust with the clientele.

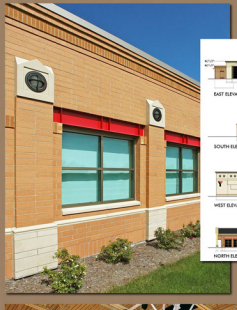
Through the design process, these connections have started to grow already. This project was about meeting the needs of the growing community and the organization. The building has been designed for now as well as the future. The successful realization of their goals is a testament to the success of the building.

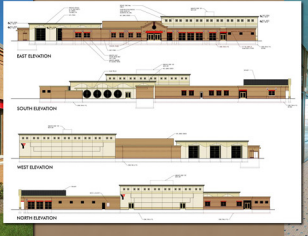


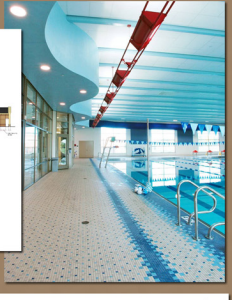


FLOOR PLAN













SITE PLAN



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