

'Horizons' Program Introduces Girls' To Future Professional Opportunities

DALLAS For the past eight years, AIA Dallas' Women in Architecture has reached out to girls in elementary and middle-school grades through a national program called Expanding Your Horizons. The program encourages girls to continue their studies in math and science by introducing them to interesting career options in technical subjects. The students participate in hands-on workshops of fun activities associated with various career fields such as architecture, forensic art, electronics, among others. This year's event attracted a total of 78 girls (three from fifth grade, 25 sixth graders, 32 seventh graders, 17 eighth graders, and one ninth grader).

Women working in those fields give presentations and lead workshops that are designed to attract a wide range of participants, not just girls who already find math and science appealing. For the architecture portion of the event, the presenters spoke about their work environment and the range of options available in their architectural profession.

Women in Architecture of Dallas conducted its first Expanding Your Horizons program in February 2000 with presentations by Melinda Poss, AIA, and Carolyn Howard. This year's

Women in Architecture involvement, facilitated by Penny Ball, was presented by three women from different areas of the architectural profession: Lennie Chamberlin explained her duties as a facilities design specialist with Dallas County Community College District; Maria Cadiloros with Terracon discussed investigations into property conditions, as well as her travels for work; and I described a typical day at Archiphy, the architecture firm where I work and where my routine client interaction often has a direct impact on design decisions.

This year, the workshop assignment consisted of designing a school, a gymnasium, or a library, with a site plan provided to scale. The site had a parking lot as well as roads and contours. The program called for the girls to place the building within the constraints of the site. The girls were given walls, doors, HVAC rooms, along with cutouts of furniture, restrooms, trees, etc. The sessions were like mini studios with input from us including discussions about how to place the building on site and making efficient layouts to reduce cost.

At first the girls looked puzzled about the process, but as we explained the program and what the symbols represented they got more involved; they asked many questions about their layouts and some were drawn to site development and landscaping. We discussed some



Girls from fifth to ninth grades learned about future career options, including the architectural profession, during the "Expand Your Horizons" program in Dallas.

construction details, such as how to construct a wall to keep moisture out and avoid mold as well as notions about the arch. They grasped the new information very quickly and got comfortable working in a team environment while designing interesting vignettes.

Overall, the experience was very rewarding. We noticed how the girls became interested in the design process, and we hope the activities will lead them to learn more or even choose architecture as their careers.

M A R G I N E B I S W A S , A I A

Women in Architecture of Dallas meets the third Wednesday of each month at noon at the AIA Dallas office. For more information on Expanding Your Horizons, visit www.EYHnet.org.

PHOTO BY MARGINE BISWAS, AIA

Two Texas Communities Picked for SDAT

Two Texas communities are among 10 selected across the U.S. for study this year by an AIA Sustainable Design Assistance Team (SDAT) to help develop strategies for improving environmental conditions and preserving a sense of place while faced with suburban sprawl. Fort Worth and Leon Valley, a 3.5-square-mile swath of former ranchland in northwest San Antonio, have visits scheduled later this year by teams composed of volunteer architects, urban designers, planners, and other specialists. The SDAT program, organized by the AIA Center for Communities By Design, was inaugurated in 2005 and since then has selected an annual roster of cities and towns for team visits. This year marks the first time a Texas community has been included.

The SDAT program is similar to the AIA's Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) program that has long served as a catalyst for community self-examination and

planning of more livable places. While these two programs remain distinct, the contemporary emphasis on environmental issues affords the SDAT program an increasingly prominent position in AIA outreach and knowledge generation. According to David Downey, Assoc. AIA, former managing director of the AIA Center for Communities by Design, "The SDAT program [helps] communities address neighborhood revitalization, transportation infrastructure challenges, as well as offer sound strategies to improve air and water quality, and local economic development."

The two Texas communities requested SDAT expertise in resolving specific issues. Fort Worth's specified air and water quality, growth management, and economic revitalization. Leon Valley specified business development, housing type variety, and transportation facilities. "It was obvious that much had been invested and the stories in these two communities were compelling," said Erin Simmons, director of

the Center for Communities by Design and a member of the selection committee.

The SDAT process begins with an orientation visit by the team leader who will meet with local leaders and stakeholders, and solicit research necessary for producing a preliminary report. The main event is the team visit, taking the form of a facilitated charrette lasting two to three days. The team applies its problem-seeking and problem-solving expertise within the context of community goals, generally or specifically put forward in the submittal. And in the pursuit of measurable outcome, the process reaches its conclusion through a meeting to discuss the team's final report. The team will follow up with a one-year assessment. The anticipated result of the charrette is a strategic plan for building a community more in harmony with the local and global environment.

J E F F P O T T E R , A I A

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