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PRESS RELEASE

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THE CENTER FOR ACTIVE DESIGN ANNOUNCES ITS FIRST ANNUAL EXCELLENCE AWARDS RECOGNIZING INNOVATION IN DESIGN TO PROMOTE PUBLIC HEALTH.

Active Design is quickly gaining momentum as an effective solution to the rise in chronic diseases, recognized as today's greatest health epidemics. The Center for Active Design is the leader of this new design and health movement.

Center for Active Design Excellence Award

(New York, NY) The Center for Active Design today announced the winners of the first annual Center for Active Design Excellence award. This is the first ever Active Design awards competition recognizing the role design plays in addressing the ongoing obesity and chronic disease epidemic by encouraging physical activity through the design of buildings and public space. The Center was launched in New York City in 2013 by the Bloomberg Administration as a result of the City's Obesity Task Force. In the past year, momentum for Active Design has grown rapidly, extending beyond NYC with the Center's website reaching over 150 countries. The 40+ qualified entrants to the Excellence award competition reflect this geographic range as well as a range of typologies represented in new construction and renovation projects.

The winners were selected by a jury of distinguished design and health professionals: David Burney, FAIA, Center for Active Design Board Chair; Christine Johnson, Assistant Commissioner, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; Bill Menkin, Editor in Chief, Architects Newspaper; and Signe Nielson, FASLA, Mathews Nielsen Landscape Architects. The jury selected four winning projects and two honorable mentions for the Center for Active Design Excellence award. The jury selected one winning firm for the Leadership in Active Design Excellence award. The selection criteria required built projects to be complete and to have implemented at least one of the Center's four Active Design categories: Active Transportation; Active Recreation; Healthy Food Access; or Active Building. Adherence to the checklists found in the *Active Design Guidelines*, published in 2010, were used as a base qualification. Preference was given to projects with research studies. In making its selections, the jury also acknowledged the extent to which cross-sector and community collaboration were required in order to realize the results achieved. The Leadership in Active Design Excellence award recognizes an early adopter of Active Design with an established track record of Active Design implementation. All winning projects exemplify innovation in the implementation of Active Design.

Award recipients will be recognized at "Celebrate Active Design", to be held in New York City on May 19, 2014. The fundraising event is open to the public from 7pm – 9pm and tickets are available through the Center's website: www.centerforactivedesign.org/celebrateactivedesign.

The Winners

Buckingham County Elementary School, Dillwyn, Virginia

“The Buckingham County Elementary School is inspiring - their incorporation of active design guidelines and healthy food access has made this school a beautiful, healthy and fun place to learn,” said Christine Johnson.

The Buckingham County Elementary School, designed by VMDO Architects, P.C., re-defines education for its 960 elementary students, serving the residents of Dillwyn, Virginia. This existing rural community, sustained by the timber and industrial farming industries, offers little access to fresh, healthy foods or parks and paths for play and activity. The project team, consisting of public health professionals, researchers, and architectural and landscape designers, sought to develop an elementary school with transformative health goals. In the short term, they aimed to provide increased access to healthy foods and hands-on nutrition education, as well as create places for physical activity. In the long term, they hope to shape the way today’s youth think about physical activity and healthy eating choices as they age. Post-occupancy evaluations and data collection to measure success were part of the team’s initial plans.

The School’s greatest Active Design innovations come from the team’s approach to Healthy Food Access. Inside the school, a teaching kitchen and food lab lounge instruct children on good nutrition and healthy meals in a fun and interactive environment. The kitchen garden offers a variety of raised bed heights for users of varying abilities and heights. A grab-n-go garden adjacent to the play areas facilitates healthy snacking right off the plant. While working on the project, the team developed *Healthy Eating Design Guidelines for School Architecture*, published by the Center for Disease Control.

The project uses Active Design strategies reflected in the Active Buildings, Active Recreation, and Healthy Food Access approaches. The naturally lit, monumental lobby stair connects two shared common spaces and functions as a social hub. Ergonomic seating designed for micro-movement allows children to fidget, lean, and sway as they participate in hands-on learning activities, and additional furniture options encourage active postures. Circulation patterns, integrated way-finding graphics, and visual access to the commercial kitchen in the cafeteria connects children with food preparation and service. Outside, 15 acres are designed for intergenerational use, with fitness and movement opportunities co-located alongside learning spaces, including a sustainable garden for public and school use.

Sephardic Community Center, Brooklyn, New York

“Bringing Active Design principles to a building renovation can be challenging, given the constraints of an existing building. But the renovation of the Sephardic Community Center show what can be accomplished,” said David Burney. “Not only does the renovated building include active recreation such as a gym, fitness center and pool; the main lobby staircase, wide and light-filled, becomes the most prominent circulation path, made even more inviting by the long glass wall bearing images of Sephardic immigrants.”

BKSK Architects renovated and expanded Brooklyn’s Sephardic Community Center, which was housed in a 30-year old building. The renovation and expansion needed to preserve the importance the original building held in the minds of its members and also create new spaces for a range of educational, athletic, and social service programs. The completed project serves preschoolers, school-aged children, young adults, adults, and senior citizens while also extending a clear invitation to all to participate in community events.

The Sephardic Community Center’s greatest Active Building innovation is the use of the central stair as the focal point for the community. Design of a 5’-8” wide central lobby stair connects the building’s three stories, and also connects the Community Center’s multi generational users. A key innovation is the glass wall along the wide central stair that incorporates over 400 images of family members who immigrated to the U.S. from Syria and other parts of the Middle East. This dramatic design feature places community members themselves at the heart of the architecture, inspiring ideas of life’s legacy, vitality, and fragility. Wayfinding is made clearer and visible opportunities for rest or social engagement are fostered with comfortable seating on stair landings. Natural light is funneled into the core of the 100,000 square foot building. Elevators are located less prominently but nearby.

The Sephardic Community Center also uses Active Design strategies reflected in the Active Recreation approach. The building includes a gym, fitness center, racquetball courts, flexible program rooms, and an Olympic-sized swimming pool. The most frequented program space is the fitness center, located on the second level. Translucent partitions convert what were once visually and distinctly separate rooms into inviting areas of engagement. Boards display information on classes, health and nutrition, and community activities. Externally, the glass-walled addition reveals the energetic spirit of its community and opens up the original opaque exterior typical of its time.

Blue Hole Regional Park, Wimberley, Texas

“It achieves the difficult and delicate balance of ecological restoration combined with active use. It is a challenge because environmentally sensitive sites can be easily degraded by public access, and particularly active recreation, but in this case the balance was achieved for both the benefit of the site as well as users. The types of active recreation that have been embedded into the plan are appropriate for the site and enable the visitor to engage with nature, again, in a way that protects the fragile aspects while stimulating the user,” said Signe Nielsen.

Blue Hole is a natural spring-fed swimming hole and a long-time treasured Texas Hill Country destination for visitors and residents alike. Because years of unmanaged recreational activities had damaged the site and ecosystem, and residents desired to restore Blue Hole, it was purchased for use as a regional park. A design team led by Design Workshop, Inc., including Taniguchi & Associates, was asked to develop a new park to accommodate visitors, restore damaged ecosystems, and reflect the local vernacular cherished by the community, while minimizing environmental degradation. Additionally, stakeholders sought to make the park a Sustainable Sites Initiative (SITES) certified project, which would require a careful balance between visitor needs and restoration of the ecosystem. Early on, the design team learned it would have to incorporate the community’s desire for active recreational uses in the park, which were expressed in a public visioning charrette.

Innovative Active Recreation strategies are clearly evident throughout the project. The park supports active and educational uses with soccer fields, basketball courts, playgrounds, camping sites, and swimming in Blue Hole. The design manages to preserve seventy percent of the area’s tree coverage, which provides shade for outdoor active spaces. Nearly five miles of recreational trails were added, including a connection to the regional hiking/biking trail. Pedestrian routes to spaces within the park were made safe, visible, and well-lit. The project is one star SITES Certified and the largest SITES certified project in the nation. Certification aligns with Active Design in its multidisciplinary approach to development and moves a step further than sustainability in lowering carbon emissions, cleaning air and water, restoring habitats, and increasing energy efficiency, all of which promote a healthier environment for people and the earth.

To encourage children to move, the design team created nature-based play features made from re-purposed materials found on-site, such as a limestone interactive water table, a sand pit, and “Cedar Teepees” formed with upside-down cedar roots. A particularly notable achievement is the design team’s ability to protect 96% of the area from development while adding 320,000 square feet of active programming. Post-occupancy surveys show a 116% increase in average user satisfaction. A record 37,000 park visitors enjoyed the site between Memorial Day and Labor Day during the summer of 2013.

Greenbridge Master Plan, King County, Washington

“From the outset Greenbridge sought the input of its community with early design meetings conducted in six different languages to reflect its diverse residents. This inclusive process has resulted in a vibrant, art-filled neighborhood that connects its residents through play, gardening, walkable and bikable streets. This project will change lives,” said Joanna Frank, Executive Director, Center for Active Design.

The Greenbridge Master Plan includes innovation in using Active Design strategies in site planning for housing mixed with recreational facilities. Upon receiving a HOPE VI grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the King County Housing Authority commissioned GGLO to develop a plan for the revitalization of an existing affordable housing site in Seattle. Major challenges to revitalizing the 100-acre site included creating a walkable design that fit within the context of the existing diverse, low income, low-density neighborhood. The challenge grew even further with the goal of transforming the single-use residential configuration into a vibrant mixed-use neighborhood.

Innovations occurred at the design as well as policy levels. Placemaking was achieved with particular creativity for this project type, with over twenty art elements commissioned. Art is located in relation to the reserved existing trees to enrich sensory cues that support walkability and create nodes for community gathering. A number of regulatory changes were required by King County in order to accomplish the desired design outcome. An innovative Demonstration Ordinance, supported by King County, enabled a number of variances to Land Use and Building Codes, and allowed for several alternative design solutions to achieve affordable housing in a low-impact development.

The Greenbridge Master Plan integrates Active Recreation and Active Transportation strategies seamlessly. To support the livability and health of residents, the design team focused on four elements: connectivity; open space diversity; adjacent uses; and placemaking. A variety of pedestrian routes pass by many types of destinations and encourage residents of different ages and abilities to walk instead of drive. Open spaces ranging in size, such as community parks, food gardens, and pocket parks, are located throughout the site and connected by sidewalks, trails, and paths. These recreation spaces are also located alongside adjacent uses, such as homes, schools, and community centers, which put “eyes on the street” and increase safety.

Honorable Mentions

Gammel Hellerup High School Gymnasium + Multipurpose Hall, Hellerup, Denmark

Signe Nielsen found notable “making use of the building’s roof in dense urban areas where every space needs to perform multiple functions. The innovation in this case is that the roof is accessible from the public sidewalk so it becomes an opportunity for added social and active space adjacent to the public realm.”

The Gammel Hellerup High School Gymnasium, designed by the BIG-BJARK INGELS GROUP, is a response to the local high school’s request for a multifunctional space in which its students could engage in physical activities and socialize. Wishing to have the facility placed in its existing courtyard while maintaining sight lines and connectivity with the 1950’s-era school building, BIG’s solution was to build the gymnasium sixteen feet below ground. Inside, sports are the typical activity in the 12,500 sf space, and the school has experienced an increase in high-caliber athletes applying for admission. The space is also equipped to serve as a multipurpose venue and can accommodate a variety of large group gatherings, from academic to social opportunities. Incorporating Active Recreation strategies was rather straightforward due to the required program. The innovation came with the implementation of Active Building strategies. The sloping roof of the gymnasium is an accessible, dynamic area for social gatherings and acts a large hilly schoolyard designed with a “molehill” peak. This creative plan transforms a historically underutilized courtyard. White furniture is affixed to the curvilinear roof in distinct areas, which offer informal congregation spaces. These are routinely used for class activities as well as social purposes. A new entry to the school removes the preexisting barrier between neighboring community, which has enabled the school to host community events.

Gensler Newport Beach, Newport Beach, California

“Gensler is a leader in Active Design in the workplace and they show what can be done by the design of their own offices. The images of staff members scooting and biking around the building are inspiring!” said David Burney.

Gensler realized the firm’s “Healthy Workplace Initiative” through the extensive renovation of their own office space. The Initiative is the result of Gensler’s workplace research, captured in its Workplace Performance Index developed to record office behaviors, and aims to increase employee health. One component of this initiative is to promote greater employee movement. The office was programmatically organized to encourage employees to actively move about the office throughout the day. Company-owned scooters, bikes, and sometimes skateboards are routinely used for inter-office travel. The production room is on the first floor and the break room on the second. Recycling and trash bins have been removed from individual desks and centrally located instead. Additionally, recognizing that certain types of work are produced better in different environments, the open office plan provides places for focus and collaboration. This further encourages staff to move away from their desks and into alternative work environments throughout the day. The firm has established follow up evaluation systems to track the impacts of these strategies on employee health. The “Healthy Workplace Initiative” was launched to assist corporate clients who seek to improve the wellbeing of their employees.

Leadership in Active Design Excellence Award: Les Bluestone, President of Blue Sea Development Company and Blue Sea Construction Co.

“Les Bluestone is one of the most innovative and creative developers of social housing. He has shown that affordable housing can also incorporate designs that build healthy communities, even with very tight budgets,” said David Burney.

Blue Sea Development Company has been on the leading edge of the green building industry for decades and expanded its commitment to health as an early contributor to the *Active Design Guidelines*. Under Les Bluestone, Blue Sea Development pioneered the implementation of Active Design strategies in affordable housing. The company’s case studies and financial pro formas were instrumental in informing the *Active Design: Affordable Design for Affordable Housing* publication distributed by the Center for Active Design.

In 2011, Blue Sea Development completed “The Melody,” a low- and moderate-income co-op in the South Bronx, the first development to receive a LEED Innovation Credit for Health through Physical Activity.

“Arbor House,” a low-income rental building completed in the South Bronx in 2013, uses all of the applicable Active Design strategies. In addition, it addresses the lack of access to healthy food in this neighborhood by integrating a 10,000 sf hydroponic rooftop farm, which will function as a community supported agriculture (CSA) arrangement in which “Arbor House” residents can purchase shares of healthy food produced by the farm.

Mount Sinai Hospital is conducting a formal evaluation of “Arbor House” to assess the impact of Active Design and other health-related strategies on the well-being of its residents.

In January 2013, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) and New York City Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) selected Blue Sea Development Company to lead revitalization of Prospect Plaza, Brooklyn. The project will be funded by the HOPE VI Grant it received from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The residential project will comprise 364 units with 80 units of NYCHA public housing, and include a space for a new supermarket, a community facility, a rooftop greenhouse, and a new recreation area.

Les Bluestone serves as Treasurer on the board for the Center for Active Design.

The Center was pleased to see projects submitted for review came from regions well beyond its hometown of New York City, spanning the US from New Mexico to Washington, Virginia to Texas, and countries from Argentina to Denmark. This strong showing is evidence that Active Design is growing nationally and internationally as designers are more knowledgeable of the health affects of their work.

Celebrate Active Design Fundraiser

“Celebrate Active Design” is a fundraiser and award reception in New York City on May 19th. The fundraiser will unite interest from government agencies, building and landscape architects, planners, real estate developers, policy makers, community groups, financial and public health professionals with a shared vision of re-designing our built environment to reverse the alarming rates of chronic diseases. Winning projects will be on display. Tickets are tax-deductible. Learn more at www.centerforactivedesign.org/celebrateactivedesign

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About The Center for Active Design

The Center for Active Design is an independent, not-for-profit organization committed to transforming the approach to neighborhood and building design to make health a central priority in development. The Center translates health research into design solutions that amplify the role of the built environment in encouraging physical activity and food access. It serves design professionals, policy makers, community groups, and the real estate community and maintains a multi-disciplinary perspective in its promotion and expansion of New York City's *Active Design Guidelines*.

The Center transforms the built environment by providing technical assistance, professional training, and advocacy to support the implementation of Active Design into public and private development through four key concepts:

- **ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION:** Supports a safe and vibrant environment for pedestrians, cyclists and transit riders.
- **ACTIVE BUILDINGS:** Encourages greater physical movement within a building site for users and visitors.
- **ACTIVE RECREATION:** Shapes play and activity spaces for people of different ages, interests, and abilities.
- **HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS:** Improves access to nutritious foods in communities that need it the most.

While the Center's focus is on improving public health, evidence suggests Active Design strategies also advance environmental sustainability and universal accessibility, and drive economic development and social equity.

Health + Active Design

Chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and certain cancers are the greatest health epidemics of our time and account for 7 of every 10 deaths in the U.S. Today, chronic diseases have replaced smoking as the leading cause of preventable death in the world. Globally, the cost of the top five leading chronic diseases, all linked to physical inactivity, totaled \$6.2 trillion in 2010. Their costly effects continue to rise rapidly.

Active Design is an approach to the development of buildings, streets, and neighborhoods that uses architecture and urban planning to make daily physical activity and healthy foods more accessible and inviting. Inspired by the precedent of design's impact on public health in the 19th century recognized by the massive reduction in the spread of infectious diseases, Active Design builds on health research showing that design can impact today's biggest health epidemics.

Studies have indicated cities that implement Active Design strategies tend to improve levels of physical activity and have healthier residents. Just as sustainability has evolved to become part of standard practice over the last 20 years, so will health shape the future of architectural design and neighborhood planning.

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Sephardic Community Center, Brooklyn, New York

BKSK Architects

2nd Floor view, Photo Credit: Jeffrey Totaro



Lobby Stair view, Photo Credit: Jeffrey Totaro

