

Children helped design and construct ideas in the garden gallery at Casals Elementary School.

Housing authorities and community development organizations have an increasing number of volunteer and pro bono design and architectural professionals to draw upon for their initiatives. Jonathan Moore provides a guide to such good work; Elizabeth K. Miller discusses a specific project spearheaded by Philadelphia's Community Design Collaborative.

VOLUNTEERS OF all types dedicate themselves to improving the human condition.

One such volunteer is Carlisle Slocomb Bean, AIA, a practitioner with Washington's WDG Architecture and an expert with innovative building restorations. Bean devoted his time and

energy to help Ayize Sabater, CEO of Mentors of Minorities in Education (MOMIE), build a central facility for educational, recreation, and summer enrichment programs. Sabater had originally settled in Washington, D.C.'s Columbia Heights neighborhood with thoughts of becoming a restaurateur, but soon thereafter discovered the pressing needs of his neighbor-

BY JONATHAN MOORE

hood's youth. Sabater purchased an old row house as the site for his center, however, the row house needed major renovations. A non-profit community service program linked him with Bean.

As an architect, Bean faced daunting challenges. Transforming an 80-plus year old semi-detached residential structure into a multi-purpose community center would require lots of creativity, both in terms of design and navigating the perplexities of the city's bureaucracy. Critical adjustments were required for interior and exterior support beams, foundations, walls, stairwells, and ceilings. "Our aim was to create additional space and light while retaining the integrity of the original structure," Bean explained. "Conceptual renovations were laid out on blueprints—similar to a billable project—so Ayize could steer MOMIE's donations for structural upgrades." These blueprints provided Sabater with architectural proof that his proposal was

Good Deeds Via Good Design

structurally feasible. In essence, Bean's conceptual drawings provided him with a marketing tool that he could present to his colleagues and potential MOMIE contributors. Armed with blueprints for conceptual planning, Sabater was ready to make critical budgetary and policy decisions. Floor plans, site excavations, load-bearing calculations, consultations with city code officials, even "aerial" photos from atop an adjacent building—all were essential factors for achieving this urban oasis on behalf of inner-city youth.

Bean devoted a total of 100 hours to Sabater's group, translating into an estimated \$20,000 in non-billable services. "I combined old fashioned and modern design principles, providing my client with drawings where visualization would be the chief marketing tool," Bean adds. "Along with budgetary advice, I also recommended other architects and contractors specializing in specific rehabilitation techniques, including

upgrades meeting sustainable energy standards. Overall, it was a valuable and rewarding learning experience for both of us."

The Growing Trend of Community Service Design Work

Bean's foray into community service work is becoming more and more common among design professionals nationwide. Such work is a win/win for both design professionals and their clients. Though the architects, contractors and interior designers may provide services for low or no cost, they in return gain contacts, positive public relations and opportunities for diversifying practice. Also, working with non-profit groups, government entities, neighborhood associations and academic establishments on community service work can often result in billable contracts.

For many housing agencies and community development organiza-

"Freedom, morality and human dignity consist precisely of this: people do good not through force, but because they freely choose it."

—Marcus Aurelius

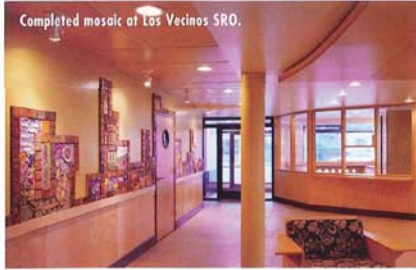
tions, this growing trend of community service design work could not come at a better time: look no further than the ravaged Gulf Coast as citizens from New Orleans to Mobile recover from Hurricane Katrina's destructive force. Shoring up coastal infrastructure and new home construction are but a few of the urgent needs requiring the special knowledge and skills of design professionals. Housing shortages and family displacement are among this disaster's worst aspects. With many communities in dire financial straits, volunteer services by architects and contractors could spell the difference between hope and prolonged despair.

"Think of disaster recovery as a huge urban renewal project," says Charles F. Harper, FAIA, an architect and nationally-recognized spokesman for disaster recovery. "With any rebuilding process, people's emotions improve when they realize their structural environment is being saved, and in many cases,

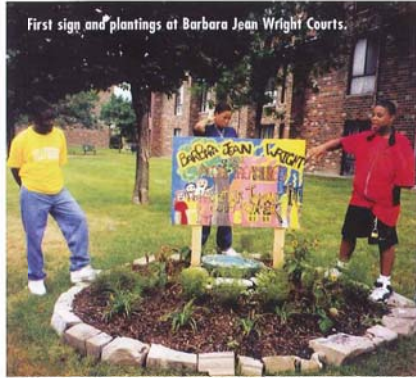
In each of Archi-Treasure's projects, kids and adults develop plans and strategies and work together as a team.



Completed mosaic at Los Vecinos SRO.



First sign and plantings at Barbara Jean Wright Courts.



even improved. If ever there was a time for design professionals to show volunteerism on behalf of livable communities, that time is now."

The usefulness of these volunteer and low-cost design initiatives is not limited to disaster recovery. With increased traffic congestion and higher energy consumption, there is renewed focus on the logistical benefits of inner-city neighborhoods. For architects, this focus has opened up new opportunities for practice, as well as broadened public awareness of the vital role design professionals play in building aestheti-

cally pleasing and safe structures. One key aspect in the creation of livable inner-city neighborhoods is the efficient use of public space, which the Chicago non-profit group Archi-Treasures, headed by architect Peter Landon, FAIA, works with clients to achieve. Landon is also one of 12 licensed practitioners

making up the Chicago Design Initiative (CDI), which reviews zoning, code, and plan commissions.

CDI is working with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Chicago's housing authority on a possible HOPE VI initiative, a federal program that replaces the nation's most distressed public housing with new mixed-income structures. "There are numerous building strategies and financial incentives for neighborhood preservation and redevelopment," says Landon, founder and principal of Chicago's Landon Bone Baker Architects, a firm noted for designing subsidized, market-rate, and



In Philadelphia, the Community Design Collaborative helped the Allegheny West Foundation explore options for infill housing units that combine two vacant properties into one new house.



This computer rendering of a Magnolia Street unit section shows a flexible living space that can be used for both working and entertaining.

private housing. "Affordable housing provides a pride of ownership ethic critical for the survival and prosperity of urban neighborhoods," he adds.

Kathleen A. Dorgan, AIA, principal of Dorgan Architecture & Planning in Storrs, Conn. is another proponent of comprehensive community development. Dorgan has donated her time to work with historic and inner-city neighborhoods

A sketch of 32nd Street. Note the combination of private gardens and semi-public green space.



in the Northeast and MidAtlantic regions, implementing innovative design concepts on projects in Albany, New York's Capitol Hill neighborhoods and towns along the Hudson River Valley. Dorgan's

community service also includes HUD's Community Builders Fellow program, providing her home state of Connecticut with technical assistance and outreach programs.

(Continued on page 33.)

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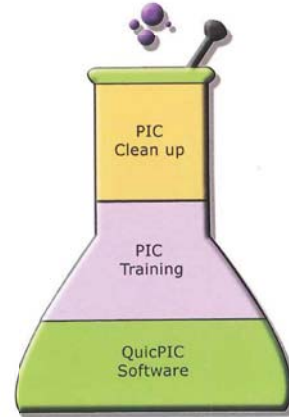
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the Redevelopment Authority, Philadelphia's Office of Housing and Community Development, and the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency. The agencies allocated a total of \$1.2 million for site acquisition, design, and construction for the project, which included both single- and double-lot infill housing. Since the 2004 groundbreaking, the fourteen vacant lots were reconfigured to create nine new homeown-

ership units. Nearly all of the new infill units have been completed and occupied. Hinton sees a solid future for the Allegheny West neighborhood and has proceeded to the next set of blocks. This project has become a citywide and national model for how cleared lots can be reintegrated back into the neighborhood, rebuilt at a lower density.

The Allegheny West Foundation used the Collaborative's conceptual designs to explain their approach to infill housing development, including this "double-wide" row house on the 1900 Block of Somerset Street.



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Community development corporations have become a central hub of neighborhood revitalization activities such as the Allegheny West project. Whether they develop projects themselves or work with a for-profit partner to make it happen, CDCs have first-hand knowledge of a community's housing, education, safety and economic development needs, and often maintain the neighborhood plan. The Collaborative relies on the innovative thinking of these partners to keep its volunteer network active. ■

Allegheny West Foundation Forgotten Block Projects

Garnet Street (2002-22)

Conceptual Plan for Block Improvement Volunteers: **Glenn Conley, AIA; Richard Beck, AIA; Ryan McGrath and Linda Muronda, Intern Architects**

Value of Service: \$21,570

Somerset Street (2002-23)

Conceptual Side Yard Study Volunteers: **Rafael Utrera, AIA; Richard Beck, AIA; Nathan Morgan and Adam Scott, Intern Architects.**

Value of Services: \$14,320