

Design on the Societal Battlefield

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Design on the Societal Battlefield is a 3-year project of the Building Institute, a design-build, service-learning program at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, in which architecture students designed a master plan for a homeless shelter and then, immediately, fast-tracked the deployment of 17 projects on the site.

The Outreach Center is a nonprofit organization, which assists the homeless and those in need in an eight-parish region of Southwestern Louisiana. It meets the basic needs of over 60 people per day as well as attempting to return its clients to fulfilling, self-sustaining lives. In the Fall of 2003, the Center's director, Valerie Keller, requested the help of the School of Architecture and Design in developing an overall space utilization plan and in particular, designing a storage system to aid in organizing donations.

Visiting the site—a city block full of sprawling, disconnected structures—made the students aware of a terrible irony: while the Center's mission is “Giving People Back Their Dignity,” the physical environment and facilities were depressing, coarse, and spiritually degrading.

The design intent that emerged was twofold: first, to generate an ambitious and comprehensive long-range master plan, and second, and most importantly, to immediately design and fabricate a series of modest, inexpensive and strategic elements. The goal was not to wipe the slate clean, even if possible, but instead bring a critical, heuristic process to bear upon the existing cultural and physical site. All of the completed projects have addressed urgent needs and now these offer the clients and staff an improved environment through which to carry their life-transforming work.

For the impact of this 3-year civic engagement/service-learning initiative we asked you to read the nomination letter from Valerie Keller, Executive Director of the Outreach Center.

For more information and images of the projects, here are some links to websites that have featured our work:

The Building Institute Web Site:

www.buildinginstitute.louisiana.edu

The Building Institute: A Civic-Engagement Instrument:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/09/college/collegespecial2/coll-adp-building.html?ex=1160884800&en=0114d2709a0613f3&ei=5070>

Up To Speed: The University Of Louisiana at Lafayette's design-build curriculum makes a difference fast:

<http://www.metropolismag.com/cda/story.php?artid=1901>

Situated Learning: The Building Institute:

<http://www.onesmallproject.com/pagescontributors/contributorlafayette.html>

For the overall scope of the project we offer these individual project descriptions and credits.

BACKGROUND:

Statistical information from **Ms. Vicki Boudreaux**,
Systems Director, Outreach Center.

“Outreach Center, Inc. has been providing critical services to the homeless and the poor of Acadiana since November of 1991. The mission is “Giving People Back their Dignity.” We provide clients with basic necessities for human dignity including shelter, food, and clothing but recognize in order to rebuild lives we must meet more than physical needs—we must address their emotional, spiritual, and mental health needs as well. In addition to a comprehensive needs assessment and a case management plan including individual and group therapy, clients are provided with vocational training as well as parenting, communication and money management training.

“At Acadiana Outreach Center our clients are not just getting a “handout” but rather a “hand-up.” The services provided through Acadiana Outreach Center’s shelters & programs including the Well Day Shelter, Joshua House, Naomi House, Lighthouse Women’s & Children’s Shelter and the Job Opportunity & Training Center (JOTC) are designed to help lead them from homelessness to self-sufficiency, from shame to self-assuredness, from hopelessness to a future with possibilities.”

TIMELINE:

–Fall 2003: Master Plan by Professor Hector LaSala & Students

–Spring 2004: Parasol, New Leaf Garden, Gazebo, Bus Stop, Shelf Prototype and Outreach Center Main Sign: The first installation on the homeless shelter grounds was the **Parasol**, a canopy seating element which elegantly “stormed the beach” of this previous “no-mans-land.” Where there was no shade, no seating, no generosity for the human spirit; the installation is a welcome oasis for the clients of the shelter. It is intended that with this prototype and plans drawn by the students, other charity groups such as the Boy Scouts and church groups, can build multiple reiterations of this structure extending its positive impact across the site. 3 students constructed the project in 200 hours for approximately \$600.

On the far-reaches of the campus, the garden **gazebo** provides a needed refuge for residents of the three halfway transitional houses. The gazebo was a catalyzing event in the development of the master plan. There was client interaction at all levels- in the design, layout, forming-up and finishing of concrete, the planting of jasmine and even the inauguration. In other words, the residents of the homeless shelter took ownership of the project. The project was also a catalyst for an intense cleanup and beautification campaign, initiated by the residents themselves after they experienced the success of the gazebo. 4 students constructed the project for approximately \$500. The **Entry Gates/Bus Stop** perform the critical function of announcing “entry” to the campus while providing shaded seating for the clients while they are waiting for the bus. The project was completed in three weeks for approximately \$500.

–Summer & Fall 2004: Master Plan’s further development, WELL.mart, Closet Storage Wall, & WELL.mart Façade: Within the chapel of the homeless shelter, the students elevated the mundane program of a “wall or separation” between the chapel and the clothing donation store into something extraordinary. Based on proportions of surplus glass panels, the students designed a modular storage wall-unit which functions as children’s toy display within the donation store and a focal point in the chapel- a stained-glass window. The **Storage. Window Wall** was constructed in 8 days for less than \$200 from primarily recycled materials. The **Facade:** The designers began with the “blank-face” of a typical metal building. The designed fabrication gives proportion to an otherwise scale-less building. Its grid of galvanized pipes extends across the face, mapping the building’s surface, while becoming an armature for a fabric canopy, fiber-cement skin, plant wall and signage. The combination of shadows, well-articulated proportions and sympathetic and contrasting materials attempts to make vivid the once ordinary experience of entering the building.

–Spring 2005: VISION Strategic Plan, Well & JOTC Computer Room, and Signposts of Grace: a Meditation Garden: A barren alleyway was once the only connection between four halfway houses and the job training and rehabilitation center which serves the residents. Our students first created small installations: meditation plaques, inspired by the success stories and testimonials of residents who had graduated from the rehab program. These installations grace the walls of the meditative garden called the **Signposts of Grace**. Residents now can stop, rest and reflect upon the struggles and victories of their lives. The city selected the project as one of only a handful to fund as a pocket park. The total cost was approximately \$8000.

–Summer 2005: Meditation Gate, Main Pedestrian Gate & Sculpture, Well-mart Depot Lighting and Shelving, Parking Lot, and Performance Area and Seating Canopy Signposts of Grace Commemoration Ceremony: The **Meditation Gate** was designed and fabricated to welcome the public onto the campus. Brick paving with “OC” serves as a sort of welcome mat for the neighborhood. The project was built in two weeks for approximately \$500. To culminate the summer of work, students and faculty, in collaboration with residents of the halfway houses, local contractors and inmates from the local jail, designed and built the **Performance Space** for concerts and community events. Most importantly, the performance space provides a place to celebrate the center’s life-changing programs. The project was completed in five weeks for \$10,000

–Fall 2005: Tile Mosaic Wall: Art Education professor, Dr Lynn Bustle along with her students and clients from the Center designed and created a **broken tile, Mosaic Mural** at the main entry into the campus.

–Spring 2006: Completion of the Performance Stage Wing and Meditation Bridge. The **canopy** was installed over the stage for shading. Also, architecture students from **University of North Carolina–Charlotte** visited us during their Spring-break vacation and designed and built a **simple bridge** across a ditch that divided the neighborhood from the OC campus: a simple element but a hospitable gesture towards the adjacent community.

CREDITS:

Students: University of Louisiana at Lafayette, School of Architecture and Design: Ahmad Al-Ateyyeh, Brian Ansel, Jeff Arkell, Steven Bellanger, Gabrielle Boykin, Ashley Braquet, Guy Brignac, Brandon Burr, Denisse Castro, Nicholas Choate, Bryan Clopton, Kip Cormier, Jeremy Credeur, Brian Daigle, Lee Degeyter, Ryan Delahousaye, Alex Deshotels, Barrett Dupuis, Jeremy Durham, Joey Flynn, Brian Foley Tim Green, Christine Gregory, Eddie Guidry, Scott Hurst, Beverly Istre (**Recipient of the UL 2006 Service Learning Award**), Greg

Jefferson, Chaz Kemp, Achilleas Kitsios, Karen Koska, Miguel LaSala, Ricardo LaSala, Eric Lastrapes, Cullen LeBeouf, Ashley LeBlanc Jonathon Marcantel, Joey Marx, Mickey Mazerac, Silvana Membreno, Mike Menozzi, Annika Miller, Paul Morvant, Charles Mouton, Steven Murphy, Jessalyn Newton, Josh Newton, Sarah O'Brian, Casey Orillion, Brad Priekulis, Hamid Qabazard, Max Rollo, Nash Romero, Javier Salazar, Brian Shaver, Drew Shawver, Ed Smith, Erica Thibodeaux (**joined the Peace Corps**), Jose Thompson, Shea Trahan, Kristy Vanderlick, Aaron Vice, Karla Werneck, Amber Zipp. Also, **Eight Architecture Students from the University of North Carolina-Charlotte**,

Faculty: University of Louisiana at Lafayette, School of Architecture and Design: Edward J. Cazayoux, Co-Director of the Building Institute, W. Geoff Gjertson, Co-Director Hector LaSala, Co-Director of Acadiana Outreach Projects.

Administration and Staff: Gordon Brooks, Dean of the College of the Arts, Robert McKinney, Director of the School, Grace Boullion, Elouise Mullen, Susan Cook, Dr. Ray Authement, President, Dr. Steve Landry, VP of Academic Affairs.

Staff: Outreach Administrative Staff: Valerie Keller, Executive Director, Vicki Boudreaux, Sandi Degeyter, Todd Dugas, Sebastian, Lisa, Missy, E.J. & the rest of the Staff

Acadiana Outreach Board of Directors: Strategic Advisors: Paula Phillips Carson, PhD, SPHR, Acting Dean of the UL Lafayette College of Business; Kerry Carson, PhD, SPHR, Professor of Business.

Other Supporters from UL Lafayette: Students from the UL Lafayette School of Business, Students from UL Lafayette School of Nursing, Students from the Horticulture Department, Students from the UL Lafayette Art Department, UL Lafayette Student Government Association, Prof. Griff Blakewood, Service Learning Director. Department of Humanities: Professors Carl Franz and Lisa Graley.

Supporters from Lafayette Consolidated Government: Mayor-President Joey Durel Chris Williams, Lafayette Parish Councilmen, Bruce Conque, Lafayette Parish Councilmen, Sheriff's Trustees (inmate work program), Local Businesses and Non-Profit Organizations

Acadiana Arts Council: Buddy Palmer, Vicki Chrisman.

Supporters and Material Donors: Acme Brick, Mike Elias, Anonymous Material Donors, Artist Galleries, Barry Concrete, Mitch Barry, Begneaud Manufacturing, Don Begneaud, Trey Speyer, Bell Fencing, Carl Pollack, Supporters and Material Donors, Demand Track, Tim Melancon, Domingue Sand & Gravel, Elk Concrete-

Brooks Hamilton, Guidry Hardware, Jim Bass, Interior Plant Services, Jay Cole—Mason, JB Mouton Contractors, Popie Billeaud, Andre Billeaud, LA Digital—Rick Domas, Lemoine Company, Lenny Lemoine, Mike Rice, Shannon, Lafayette Children’s Museum, Lowe’s Home Improvement, M&E Consultant, Rick Leblanc and JT Spangler, Montgomery Electric—Paul Montgomery, Norris Rader, SW Scrap — Bruce Larivierre, 3D Chemicals—plants/fertilizers.

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Computer Models and Graphics: Scott Hurst, Casey Orillion, Brad Priekulis, Miguel LaSala, Paul Morvant, LA Digital.

Press: Marsha Sills, The Daily Advertiser, and Julie Dronet.

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The actual total cost of all the work is \$76,956.46. The actual value of the work is estimated at 2 to 3 times this cost.

Outreach Center:

2,348 people in shelters and an additional 10,238 in community outreach programs were affected by the Building Institute’s work. Clients served in 2005, from Outreach Website.