Researchers developing tool to promote patient access to outdoor environments

There is a growing body of scientific evidence underscoring the healing benefits of natural environments. Research shows natural settings with plenty of plants, sunlight, shade and fresh air have restorative powers that reduce stress, speed healing and promote mental and physical well-being.

Many modern health-care facilities are designed to take advantage of this phenomenon. They are bathed in natural light and overflowing with plants in lavish indoor and outdoor gardens. But according to researchers at Texas A&M University’s Center for Health Systems and Design, too many health-care facilities are constructed with inherent design flaws that actually discourage patients and residents from taking advantage of these natural spaces.

To remedy this problem, A&M architecture professors Susan Rodiek and Elton Abbott are working with a team of designers, psychologists, educators and health-care professionals to develop an interactive multimedia tool for teaching health facility designers how to avoid these design pitfalls and maximize the use of their facilities’ natural features.

The project, initiated by a $100,000 National Institute of Aging Small Business Innovation Research grant, specifically focuses on assisted living and long-term care centers for teaching health facility designers how to work with a team of designers, psychologists, educators and health-care professionals to develop an interactive multimedia tool for teaching health facility designers how to avoid these design pitfalls and maximize the use of their facilities’ natural features.

"We believe that facilities employing the techniques outlined in our learning modules will have a competitive advantage in marketing their facilities," Rodiek explained. "In truth, most assisted living facilities are already spending money to provide, design and maintain outdoor spaces for residents’ use. Unfortunately, they are not being designed in a way that anyone will use them."

For example, Rodiek said, the facilities lack windows and doorways that invite residents to peer or venture into these green spaces, gardens lack paved walkways and benches that facilitate access for the handicapped, and gathering places like picnic areas, arbors or gazebos are sometimes located in unriveting or hard to reach spaces.

"The multimedia design tool, a series of lesson modules packaged on interactive CD-ROMs, will be created with the project teams’ guidance by Arkitect Studio, Inc., a Bryan architectural firm where Abbott serves as a principal. The lessons will be especially designed for practicing professionals who lack sufficient time to study this rapidly growing design specialty. Employing interactive photographs, audio, video and 3-D visualization techniques, the modules will offer instruction on the health benefits of natural environments while introducing various design strategies that encourage outdoor use.

Tentatively titled, “Lifescapes: Design for Outdoor Usage at Facilities for Aging,” the CDs will ultimately include six instruction modules covering topics such as entry gardens, walkways, loops, transition zones, nature parks, social places and activity stations.

Acclaimed researchers address students and faculty of Texas A&M

Craig Zimring and Victor Regnier, leading researchers in health-care architecture, wrapped up the successful 2004-05 Center for Health Systems & Design Lecture Series with a bang. Their topics addressed how the designed environment impacts health and well-being.

Zimring’s lecture on April 4 titled, Promoting Physical Activity through Environmental Design and Regnier’s lecture on April 11 titled, Innovative Design Ideas from Northern Europe for Housing the Frail Elderly were the inaugural events held at the new Building 803, an auditorium within the Langford Architecture Center.

Mann honored for contributions to health facility design

The U.S. Surgeon General and dozens of other federal health officials visited the Texas A&M campus last December to examine architecture student designs for surge hospital facilities. The surge hospital concept involves the transformation of existing structures into fully functional medical facilities in the event of disasters that overwhelm or incapacitate existing health-care centers.

The design review was an integral part of a daylong conference sponsored by the Texas A&M University System Health Science Center’s Office of Homeland Security.

“I have seen so much innovation today. It’s overwhelming,” said Richard Carmona, the U.S. Surgeon General. “These are critical areas we must deal with at my level and globally. This is the kind of thinking we need for the future.”

He said the officials at the conference would take the students’ ideas back to Washington, D.C., to discuss with federal lawmakers and agencies working to establish a surge hospital network.

For his inspired teaching of more than 4,000 students over the past 43 years, George J. Mann, the Ronald L. Skaggs Endowed Professor in Health Facilities Design at Texas A&M, received a special recognition award from the American Institute of Architects—Academy of Architecture for Health. The honor was presented by John D. Pangrazio, AIA/AHA president, at the organization’s November 2004 conference in Washington, D.C.

The Academy of Architecture, one of 27 AIA knowledge communities, was created to advance knowledge and practice of quality health-care facility design.

In the 36 year since joining the College of Architecture faculty at Texas A&M University, Mann has spearheaded more than 400 socially significant architecture design studio projects which have enhanced the health and welfare of people in need around the world, while providing A&M students with unique opportunities to gain practical, hands-on experience through “real-world” projects yielding consequential humanitarian results.

In the process, Mann has educated a new generation of highly nuanced architects who specialize in designing smart, high-tech health-care facilities that nurture patient recovery while facilitating the numerous and ever-changing demands of modern medicine.

Today, Mann’s former students staff health-care design studios, and are counted among the principals of the world’s leading architecture firms.

In addition to populating the health-care design profession with compassionate and knowledgeable practitioners, Mann’s research and scholarly pursuits have brought new knowledge to the burgeoning field of health facilities design. Since coming to Texas A&M, Mann has attracted more than $2 million in sponsored research projects to the university.

U.S. Surgeon General reviews designs for ‘surge’ hospitals

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Graduate landscape student receives prestigious Hideo Sasaki Scholarship

For her deep appreciation of the values and philosophy advocated by landscape architecture pioneer Hideo Sasaki, Dipti Trivedi, a master of landscape architecture student at Texas A&M University, was recently selected as a finalist for the 2003-05 International Competition for the Hideo Sasaki Scholarship. The competition is sponsored by Hideo Sasaki Associates, which is today, the Sasaki Group.

Sasaki, the former chairman of Harvard University's landscape architecture program, pioneered the concept of interdisciplinary planning and design. In 1953, the same year that he joined the Harvard faculty, Sasaki founded Sasaki Associates, which is today, the Sasaki Group.

At Harvard, he revolutionized the study of landscape architecture by tying it to the larger issues of planning and by breaking down the traditional barriers between practice and teaching. Sasaki is credited with helping to shape the profession in the 20th century by insisting that landscape architecture should not just imitate its sister arts but instead can be part of a lively dynamism with architecture, civil engineering and planning.

Not unlike Sasaki, Trivedi sees bridging the gap between theory and practice and gaining work experience while in school, as essential to her professional preparation. She interned with Design Workshop in Asheville, N.C., and worked as a research assistant with the Texas Transportation Institute and with Jody Rosenblatt Naderi, a professor of landscape architecture at Texas A&M.

“We are very proud of this student...” said Dr. Dipti Trivedi. “In light of Sasaki’s philosophy, and thanks to my introduction to the profession, I have come more aware of the relationships with members of other disciplines and with the environment.”

Multigenerational community design named finalist in U.N. competition

Jim Lin, a master of architecture student, was selected as a finalist for an award sponsored by The International Council for Caring Communities in conjunction with the United Nations Program for Human Settlements. The competition invited architecture students from around the world to apply their creative talents in developing solutions that integrate older persons into the fabric of communities.

Lin was one of two U.S. university students in this competition to be named as a finalist. Students from 28 countries and more than 12 schools of architecture in the United States participated in the competition.

The concept for Lin’s project is based on studies indicating that people who receive social support tend to live longer and healthier lives than people who lack support (Bran non & Feist, 2004). His design for an apartment complex and community center on the Texas A&M campus, incorporates outdoor spaces for three generations in interaction with each other. The residents of the community include graduate students, their children and retired faculty.

The design also provided spaces such as gardens and connection paths to encourage relationships among the residents. The U.N. sponsored competition was international in its objective to stimulate meaningful solutions that enhance the living environment for all ages.

Anniversary to celebrate the future of health-care architecture at Texas A&M

This year, the College of Architecture is hosting a yearlong celebration of 100 years of architectural education at Texas A&M. Although the Center for Health Systems & Design officially arrived at the doorstep of the college in 1997, the college’s focus on health care facility design dates back to the arrival of Professor George Mann in 1966.

So next year, to mark the 40th anniversary of architecture for health programs at Texas A&M, CHSD is planning a very special conference — First Look. The conference will provide Health Industry Advisory Council members and associates with access to the latest research on health care environments. However, as we prepare for our 40th anniversary celebration, it is impossible not to ponder where we might be when our 100th anniversary rolls around in 2025. The growing numbers of faculty and students dedicated to health care design suggest an unprecedented opportunity to reach out and change the world.

In the words of Rainer Maria Rilke, the great 20th century German poet:

“The hour is striking so close above me, so clear and sharp, that all my senses ring with it. I feel it now: there comes to me to grasp and give shape to my world. I know that nothing has ever been real without my beholding it. All becoming has needed me. My looking opens things and they come toward me, to meet and be met.

While it is unlikely that our current health design faculty will be around for CHSD’s centennial celebration, some of our current students may be. I hope they reflect on us with the same pride that faculty and students share as we look back this year on the college’s founding faculty.”

Ph.D. students earn international accolades

A paper examining visual bias in architectural education, authored by two doctoral students in architecture from Texas A&M University, was one of ten papers selected last fall in an international competition for the 2003-05 European Association for Architecture Education (EAAE) Prize. The international competition is sponsored by the VELUX Group, the world’s leading manufacturer of roof windows and skylights.

The EAAE Prize is presented every two years to stimulate original writings on the subject of architectural education. For the 2003-05 competition, entrants were asked to examine “how the demands of a given educational setting, and proposes a multi-modal, ‘synesthetic,’ approach that explores different media and different modalities to achieve an embodied objective.”

“Synesthesia,” Nanda said, “is a rare neurological phenomenon in which a stimulus to one sense triggers an involuntary response in a different sense. For example, a person with this condition may see the color red when tasting chocolate.”

The symposia, which is sponsored by the A.M. Agnon Foundation for Mental Health, will begin at the Center for Health Systems & Design on April 14th at 6:30pm and continue at the Texas A&M Student Center on April 15th at 8:30am.

The symposium will feature keynote speaker Edzard Schulz, professors from Berlin, and keynote speaker Edzard Schulz, professors from Berlin.

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