

News Release

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Contact: Anne Taylor
Lord, Aeck & Sargent
404-253-6710
ataylor@lasarchitect.com
or
Ann Kohut
Kohut Communications Consulting
770-913-9747
annielk@bellsouth.net

New Interpretive Center for the Chattahoochee River Teaches Water Conservation, Practices It, Too

Sustainably Designed, “Frugal Smart” Building Targets LEED Gold

ROSWELL, Ga., June 17, 2009 – Providing a drinking water source for more than 3.5 million people, including 60 percent of metro Atlantans, the Chattahoochee River is critical to the continued success and prosperity of the region. With the June 20 opening of the Discovery Center at the Chattahoochee Nature Center, the community – adults and children alike – gains access to a sustainably designed interpretive center that brings to life the important, necessary and timely story of understanding and protecting the Chattahoochee River watershed.

Designed by architecture firm Lord, Aeck & Sargent, the 10,000-square-foot Discovery Center and nearby 4,000-square-foot Ben Brady Lakeside Pavilion were termed “frugal smart” after early meetings between Lord, Aeck & Sargent and the Chattahoochee Nature Center (CNC) determined that economical, standard building components would be used in inventive and efficient ways to show good stewardship at the non-profit organization.

The Discovery Center, with two levels and an occupiable green roof terrace, is targeting LEED gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council.

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Blending into the natural surroundings

“As an urban nature center, we wanted the Discovery Center and Ben Brady Lakeside Pavilion to reflect urban design as opposed to a ‘lodge look,’” said Ann Bergstrom, CNC executive director. “The structures are contemporary in design but also seem to blend beautifully into the natural surroundings so that we haven’t compromised the sense that they are part of the land.”

One of the ways the designers achieved union of landscape and building was to select a Discovery Center site that would provide an amalgamated building/landscape experience and minimize impact to the surrounding vegetation and river.

“We nestled the Discovery Center into a hillside to reduce thermal gain and maximize the efficiency of the building envelope, and we also chose the site because it allowed us to design a building that interacts with the site,” said Joshua Gassman, a Lord, Aeck & Sargent associate who served as project manager for the Discovery Center and the pavilion.

Gassman explained that the Discovery Center will become the new gateway to the CNC. Visitors will enter on an upper level, where they are greeted by an expansive view of the CNC site through a glass wall or from the rooftop terrace. This dramatic view inspires a sense of connection with the site and the river. From the upper entry level, visitors can easily venture outdoors to enjoy the nature trails with plant and animal habitats or move to the lower level, which features thematic live animal exhibits. The lower level takes them outside and onto the 127-acre site.

Doing the right thing

“It’s a Lord, Aeck & Sargent philosophy to do the right thing for our projects and their respective sites rather than to chase LEED credits,” said John Starr, principal in charge of the project. “So

even though we originally targeted LEED Silver certification for the Discovery Center, we came out of the design phase with what we feel confident will be a LEED Gold building.

“And since the Discovery Center is about the Chattahoochee River, we wanted to make it as water efficient as possible,” Starr continued. He noted that the building’s water strategies include:

- Capturing rainwater via a butterfly-shaped roof. The water is stored in four underground cisterns and used for toilet flushing
- Capturing condensate from the HVAC system. The condensate is pumped into the cisterns, where it and the harvested rainwater will provide enough non-potable water for toilet flushing needs
- Low-flow faucets, low-flow dual-flush toilets and waterless urinals

Other sustainable design features include:

- Building orientation that maximizes daylight harvesting for the non-exhibit upper level. (The lower level, which houses animal, fish and bird exhibits, requires highly controlled electric lighting.)
- A green roof featuring 2,000 square feet of drought tolerant native plants, most of which are found in the rock outcroppings of the Georgia Piedmont. Some of these include native Confederate daisies, moss verbena, broom sedge and other species provided by the CNC’s own nursery
- An energy-efficient HVAC system
- Use of structurally insulated panels for roof insulation
- Use of recycled content materials such as Kirei board, a strong, durable, lightweight and environmentally friendly wood substitute
- High fly ash concrete flooring
- Low VOC finishes

“We combined all of these sustainable design strategies and products with our ‘frugal smart’ strategies to create a building that looks good, didn’t cost a lot and won’t cost a lot to maintain,” Gassman said. “For example, the building is clad in cement board siding held down with Southern yellow pine wood battens. This is a highly economical and durable set of materials that creates a façade with an appropriate level of depth, shadow and textures.”

The building program

The Discovery Center houses four distinct areas that explain the intricate web of life comprising the Chattahoochee River’s unique watershed.

The lower level features the Explore Your Watershed Gallery and the Nature Exchange. The former has live native animal exhibits and interactive exhibits that teach how plants and animals work together to make the watershed thrive. The latter is a nature trading post and learning environment for young collectors, meant to encourage an interest in and understanding of the natural world. The lower level also includes a 65-seat theater that will be used extensively for video and lecture programs tied to the CNC’s educational mission.

The upper level includes the Chattahoochee River Resource Gallery, which serves as a portal of information to the Chattahoochee River watershed and highlights ways to conserve, rethink and enjoy the watershed.

The Rooftop Garden Terrace offers visitors beautiful views of the Chattahoochee River and CNC site. With its native plant palette, the rooftop terrace will be a valuable asset for the CNC education staff to teach about the benefits of green roofs, as well as offering an exceptional outdoor gathering space for visitors and the surrounding community.

The nearby Ben Brady Lakeside Pavilion overlooks Kingfisher Pond. The pavilion and its restrooms, catering kitchen and large outdoor deck will be used for education and as a rental space for special events.

Funding

The \$9.7 million project, which includes the Discovery Center and Ben Brady Lakeside Pavilion, exhibits, landscaping and site work, was privately funded. Major gifts included grants from the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation; the Chattahoochee Greenway Fund; The Kendeda Foundation; and a challenge grant from The Kresge Foundation.

“In the end, Lord, Aeck & Sargent delivered a special building that conformed to the tight budget of a non-profit organization,” the CNC’s Bergstrom said. “And after 33 years of operation, we are very excited to finally have a Discovery Center that is a tangible manifestation of our mission. In the future, visitors will have a much-enhanced learning experience when they visit the Discovery Center and learn about our local watershed and the role each of them can play in individual stewardship.”

The project team

The Discovery Center and Ben Brady Lakeside Pavilion project team included:

- Chattahoochee Nature Center (Roswell, Ga.) – owner
- Lord, Aeck & Sargent, Inc. (Atlanta) – architect
- EDAW (Atlanta) – landscape architect
- Newcomb & Boyd (Atlanta) – MEP/FP engineer; commissioning agent
- AEC (Atlanta) – civil engineer
- Palmer Engineering Co. (Atlanta) – structural engineer
- AldrichPears Associates (Vancouver, British Columbia) – exhibit designer
- WaveGuide Consulting (Atlanta) – acoustical & audio-visual consultant
- Genoa Construction (Atlanta) – general contractor
- Silverman Construction Program Management (Atlanta) – program manager

About Lord, Aeck & Sargent

Lord, Aeck & Sargent is an award-winning architectural firm serving clients in scientific, academic, historic preservation, arts and cultural, and multi-family housing and mixed-use markets. The firm’s core values are responsive design, technological expertise and exceptional service. In 2003, The Construction Specifications Institute awarded Lord, Aeck & Sargent its Environmental Sensitivity Award for showing exceptional devotion to the use of sustainable and environmentally friendly materials, and for striving to create functional, sensitive and healthy

buildings for clients. In 2007, Lord, Aeck & Sargent was one of the first architecture firms to adopt The 2030 Challenge, an initiative whose ultimate goal is the design of carbon-neutral buildings, or buildings that use no fossil-fuel greenhouse gas-emitting energy to operate, by the year 2030. Lord, Aeck & Sargent has offices in Ann Arbor, Michigan; Atlanta, Georgia; and Chapel Hill, North Carolina. For more information, visit the firm at www.lordaecksargent.com.

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