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Sarah Heinz House Expansion



Stan Pittman is the executive director of the Sarah Heinz House and had been asked about the process of adding 30,000 square feet to the north side facility that has been a positive influence on thousands of young people for 110 years. After several years of planning and fundraising, two years of construction and a couple years of operations, Pittman had the

luxury of time to reflect upon the experience. “We’re serving so many more people from the community now that it’s turned out to be exactly what we wanted it to be.”

The Sarah Heinz House was the fruition of a shared mission of H. J. Heinz and his son Howard. The younger Heinz had been moved by the plight of youth in New Haven, CT when

he attended Yale. He founded a boys club for North Side youth called Covode House near the Heinz factory, but its reach into the surrounding neighborhood created the need for more space within a decade.

The new building – named for Howard Heinz’s late mother – took two years to build and opened in 1913. Its planning had been meticulously overseen

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by Heinz and the purpose of the place also inspired H. J. Heinz, who remarked at the dedication ceremony that the Sarah Heinz House would “become a factory for building character.”

For the next 90 years the Heinz House would serve that purpose. As the North Side began to experience decline in the 1960’s the Heinz House became a sanctuary for kids growing up in a tough neighborhood. Programs were expanded. Alumni of the programs who had moved out to the suburbs took their kids into the Heinz House so that they too could benefit from the experiences there. By 2003, an optimum usage study of the Heinz House found that it was at maximum capacity in every program. Pittman took the results to the Heinz House’s board of directors with the message that they could serve no more members of the community. The board responded by authorizing the planning of the expansion.

The first stages of working towards the project went swimmingly. Sarah Heinz House put out a request for proposals and interviewed five architects later in 2003. The building committee decided that each member would write up their own review of each firm and identify their selection independent of the other members. Such a methodology can make it difficult to reach consensus but the committee members unanimously selected Rothschild Doyno Collaborative (RDC) to design the project.

“They seemed the most in touch with our mission and

understood our rationale for the project,” recalls Pittman. “Their proposal captured the essence of who we are.”

Rdc did the programming for the new construction, which was to include a new gymnasium, swimming pool, locker rooms, dance studio, exercise and activity rooms, and started planning for 30,000 square feet of new space. The Heinz House began making arrangements to acquire two parcels of land.

While the site and property acquisition problems were being solved a design dilemma arose for the addition itself. The existing Heinz House is an imposing brick and stone three-story-plus building that obviously had historical significance, but matching the existing structure with the limitation of today’s materials and labor costs was impractical.

“The board was focused on mimicking the historical look

of the existing building,” says Ken Doyno, Principal at RDC. “There was this tension between the historical approach of the masonry characteristics and the modern approach with new forms of masonry and glass and steel.”

At this point, a convergence of other interests in the project produced key design questions. One of the Heinz Endowments’ long-time partners in sustainability is architect William McDonough, of McDonough + Partners, who the Endowments’ leaders invited to consult with the team. Ken Doyno says McDonough made a critical suggestion that liberated the design.

“McDonough contributed the idea of moving the locker and fitness rooms to beneath the gymnasium, which gave us more options.”

What was designed was a two-story glazed addition awash



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with natural light and views of the skyline and surrounding neighborhoods and allowed swimmers to have the benefit of the light and views beyond. The lower building height made for a more comfortable transition between the old and the new.

Another key aspect of the project was the sustainability of the design and construction. Rothschild Doyno is an advocate for green building on every one of their projects and the Heinz Endowments have been pioneers of sustainable practices in all facets of living. For the Sarah Heinz House board, however there was a period of education as they wrestled with the perception of the cost/benefit. The project's cost had gone up through scope creep and some unexpected inflation in steel and concrete during the planning and green building was still viewed as a luxury by many in the industry,

particularly uninitiated owners of buildings.

"Heinz Endowments influenced us about sustainability," says Pittman. "As we discussed it as a board we convinced ourselves it was the right thing to do. Sustainability fits in well with one of our key concepts, which is healthy choices. We met with the architects and decided that LEED Silver was attainable within our budget."

LEED was still new to the mainstream market in 2004 but RDC had developed a planning approach that made consensus easier. Their planning even made it possible to reach LEED Gold.

"We put all the possible points on the table and got the aspirational goals out there as well," Doyno says. RDC's plan took advantage of the many opportunities the tough urban site offered for converting unsustainable qualities into

sustainable features. "There were enough options that we actually had a cushion to reach silver and we always had other possibilities of things that could have been done as the job progressed. Everyone committed to going for [higher LEED certification] when the fruit got low enough. Anyone would do that if you can get gold instead of silver."

When the project started, Sarah Heinz House was serving 750 members and roughly 800 non-members in community oriented programs. The new programs have mushroomed the Heinz House footprint. There are 1,043 members and an additional 4,725 youths served in related programs. During the school year an average of 318 young people attend the programs daily. The process of planning and construction mirrored the kind of collaborative effort to which Heinz House aspires.

For Stan Pittman it was about four years of pretending to be a construction manager as well as trying to do his job as executive. Wearing two hats and raising \$11.4 million dollars is something he tells his peers not to do. But the stress of the effort has receded with the pleasure of operating in the new facility.

"I'm glad we did it," he laughs. "And I pray we did as good a job of planning this building as H. J. did on the original. That building worked for about 90 years. If we can say the same thing some day we'll have done pretty well."