

Good Neighbor Program

October 2007
Issue 23

*Community Oriented:
Active Public Buildings
Sites and Designs
Collaboration*

*"It isn't what you don't know that gets you in trouble;
it's what you know for sure that isn't so."*

- Mark Twain



REGIONAL NEWS:

ACTIVE PUBLIC BUILDINGS



A performer rehearses for aerial dance piece at the J.J. Pickle Federal Building in Austin TX this past June. Photos by Amitava Sarkar.

A Breathtaking "Constellation" in Austin

You might think that it would take all the stars of the universe to align before there would be an aerial dance performance on the face of 10-story federal building, but we're happy to say that it happened this past June in Austin, Texas. Defying easy categorization just as it defies gravity, Austin's Blue Lapis Light dance company combines music, light, interpretive dance, and sturdy carabineers in ways that make us see the built environment in new ways. Lead by artistic director Sally Jacques, the company performed "Constellation" on the opposing facades of the J.J. Pickle Federal Building and the Homer Thornberry Federal Building, high above a nighttime crowd on the plaza below. Hosted by GSA's Greater Southwest Region, the work raises our expectations about what art and federal buildings can be. If there was a 'star-aligner' involved, it must have been GSA property manager Steve Rutledge, who worked out all the legal and logistical minutiae — an effort he says was well worth it. As the Austin American Statesmen noted, this might be "the most beautiful a federal building has ever been." Contact Steve Rutledge (512) 916-5016.



The Blue Lapis Light dance company performs "Constellation" above the Pickle-Thornberry Plaza.

Photos here: [Photos by Amitava Sarkar](#)

Video here: <http://www.bluelapislight.org/constellation.html>

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A, Like, Totally Glamorous Court in Phoenix

The Sandra Day O'Connor United States Courthouse in Phoenix, Arizona is no stranger to trials and hearings, but this past spring the building's gleaming glass atrium held court of a different type — prom court. Centennial High School of Peoria, a suburb of Phoenix, hosted the evening for more than 600 students. This



The sparkly elegance of the great glass atrium in Phoenix's O'Connor Courthouse was matched only by the bright smiles and dressy duds of Centennial High School prom-goers.



A closed street is now one of downtown Sioux Falls' most active public spaces.

year's prom—*A World of Pure Imagination*—featured a DJ, lit dance floor, performance artists, and plenty of wall flowers, we suspect. Refreshments were served on the mezzanine level near the beautiful Special Proceedings Courtroom, known for its Lens Ceiling by artist James Carpenter. Teachers and parents liked the courthouse location because the friendly federal security presence ensured the safety of all students, while students, no doubt, appreciated the fact that it wasn't in their school gym. The atrium's innovative cooling system came in handy as well, as misters helped to efficiently cool the grand space. In fact, GSA's Pacific Rim regional office hosts many proms in the Courthouse during the late spring and the atrium is in high demand throughout the year. This February, for example, the NFL will hold Superbowl-related functions in the space as Phoenix plays host to the big game. Contact Lynn Rathman, (602) 206-2588.

New Civic Space for Downtown Sioux Falls

Last Fall, GSA's Rocky Mountain Region dedicated the new Courthouse Square Building and Plaza in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The build-to-suit leased building for the U.S. Attorneys is adjacent to downtown's historic U.S. Courthouse. The new building represents a convergence of excellent design, sustainability and community involvement. As the first LEED-Gold Certified building in the Sioux Falls region, it incorporates innovations including recycled building materials, bicycle commuter changing rooms, and a geothermal heating and cooling system. Outside, the new plaza serves as both a security element and a community gathering place, making good use of a closed street by incorporating suggestions from a series of community workshops. The courthouse plaza, now managed by Main Street Sioux Falls, already has become one of the city's most lively public spaces, hosting events including an antique car show, art exhibits, and a summer music series. Contact Janet Preisser, (303) 236-8000 x5248.

Pioneer Courthouse Documentary: Now Playing in Portland

A documentary film about the Pioneer Courthouse and its recent seismic upgrade and renovation by GSA's Northwest/Arctic Region is showing daily in Portland's world-famous Pioneer Square. Playing in the Visitor Information Center's 75-seat surround sound theater, this 15-minute film highlights the rich history of the Pioneer Courthouse, a National Historic Landmark, and its role in the city. The film won a 2006 Telly Award, which honors outstanding local and regional video and film productions. At Pioneer Courthouse Square, scheduled show times are Monday through Friday at 10:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m. and 1:30 p.m. Contact Peter Gray, (253) 931-7356.

REGIONAL NEWS

SITES & DESIGNS

If It Were a Car, It'd Be a Hybrid

The recently-completed Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regional headquarters building in downtown Denver is a nine-story structure that houses 900 employees. In keeping with the agency's mission, the leased building is a model of both environmental and neighborhood sustainability. Its red brick and glass façade complements the masonry and low-rise buildings surrounding the prominent Lower Downtown (LoDo) Historic District site. And while the main office building is setback from the street, the building provides wrap-around retail space on the first floor. A requirement of the district, this also shows an innovative way to provide the security setback required of many federal agencies without undermining the commercial character of the neighborhood. The building is located near Union Station, the primary transit hub for Denver, and is topped by the city's first green roof, featuring a garden of drought tolerant plants. The green roof filters and holds storm water, cools roof temperatures to reduce the urban heat island effect, enhances the building's thermal performance, and improves air quality. Photovoltaic panels on the penthouse help power the emergency generator, and the roof was designed to support future installation of more panels and wind turbines. Not surprisingly, this comprehensive approach is expected to make the new EPA Regional Headquarters the



The newest highlight on Denver's skyline is decidedly "green"—while also matching the brick neighborhood that it graces. Wrap around retail is planned for the base on two sides.

first LEED-Gold Certified new construction in downtown Denver. It provides an excellent example of how local design, environmental, and agency mission goals can be mutually supportive. Contact Janet Preisser, (303) 236-8000 x5248.

Storefront Retail Available at Agency Headquarters

GSA's National Capital Region has awarded a management contract to NOMA Retail, LLC, to manage 8,000 square feet of retail space adjacent to the new Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) headquarters building in downtown Washington DC. The firm will market the retail space, oversee the design and construction of individual shops, and provide ongoing management. While the building is highly secure and has large setbacks from the street, the site design provides for a narrow strip of retail at the sidewalk, set away from the office building. This is meant to make the most of this Metro-adjacent site, bring amenities to employees, and enliven the neighborhood. Mark Stadskev, Senior Contracting Officer of GSA's Triangle Service Center, and Robert Schlattman, Office of Regional Counsel teamed to award this contract. Contact Mark Stadskev, (202) 205-9160.



Clever design makes streetfront retail possible at this high-security federal building.

Small Project Hopes to Spark Dramatic Change

Like many American cities, Frankfort, Kentucky, was the subject of a well-intentioned – but ultimately unsuccessful – downtown urban renewal project in the 1960s and 1970s. The construction of state office buildings, private offices, and the John C. Watts Federal Building, among others, on a raised viaduct created a confusing civic center marked by grade changes, dead ends, and barren plazas. Now GSA's Southeast Sunbelt Region is opening the door to small-scale change that could help transform the place. While planning repairs to a portion of the Federal Building's elevated plaza, GSA asked Carol R. Johnson and Associates, a Boston-based landscape architecture firm, to use the project as an opportunity to revision the plaza and its connections to other spaces. The designer is considering how passive activities, interpretive texts, and attractive gardens could create a new place to stop downtown, while improving pedestrian connections with the neighboring Old State Capitol. Though small in budget, GSA expects the project to make a subtle, but important, contribution to this civic district. Contact Kenny Aina, (404) 331-6142.



The rear plaza at the Watts Federal Building in Frankfort, Kentucky soon will offer an improved public presence in the state's capital city.

Leaks Lead to Silver Lining

If the squeaky wheel gets the grease then, perhaps, the leaky plaza gets the green. At least that's the case in San Francisco, where GSA's Pacific Rim Region is working on the Philip Burton Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse. The building's dynamic plaza, completed in 2000, has been the site of very little public activity over the years, as high winds and lack of sun cover made it an inhospitable place. At the same time, beneath the surface, the plaza has been subject to serious water infiltration. With these concerns in mind, a 2003 workshop led by Project for Public Spaces brainstormed some promising improvements. Now a project is underway to introduce new wind baffles, heartier trees and plants, and other amenities to make the most of the plaza's good qualities. Employees and visitors should expect to find a rejuvenated plaza later this year. Contact Patrick Vasco, (415) 436-7948.

Bet Your Bottom Dollar You Lose the Blues in Chicago

State Street may be "that Great Street," but GSA's Great Lakes Region is working to make it better. In order to enhance security at the Mies van der Rohe-designed Chicago Federal Center and support future expansion needs, GSA recently acquired a half block of land between the Everett M. Dirksen U.S. Courthouse and State Street. Although the expansion project is years away, the site is in the heart of a busy district that welcomes improvement now. The site fronts State Street and includes several occupied retail buildings, but it certainly doesn't have the allure that Sinatra swooned about. So GSA hired design firm Rios Clementi Hale Studios, of Los Angeles, to develop a design for near-term improvements to the State Street storefronts and the mid-block area known as Quincy Court. The team hopes to transform what is currently a service alley into an outdoor pedestrian public space with limited vehicular access for delivery trucks. The proposed design includes ab-

stracted tree-like canopy elements made of steel and translucent acrylic panels, an LED wall that will act as a virtual water feature, site furniture that will provide a variety of seating configurations beneath the canopies, and hardscape improvements. The project aims to unify the appearance of State Street with color, graphics, and common signage, while creating a sense of place that welcomes pedestrians and visitors, enhances site security, and improves circulation. Contact Julie Hoffman, (312)353-6830.

●●●●● REGIONAL NEWS: COLLABORATION WITH CLIENTS & COMMUNITIES

Charleston Students Lend Preservation Skills to GSA

Joining together to foster both learning and business development goals, sixteen College of Charleston Historic Preservation/Community Planning students partnered with GSA's Southeast Sunbelt Region last spring to produce historic resources assessment reports on the U.S. Customs House in Charleston, SC, built in 1870. Under the direction of Professor J.L. Ward, students used laser-scanning equipment to develop a virtual three-dimensional model of the building. This technology provided information on the structure's current state and helped the students develop drawings of the public space elevations with the original 1800 dome design. The student-produced documentary drawings and rehabilitation research reports will be incorporated into GSA's renovation and preservation evaluation of the historic Greek Revival facility. Student renderings were also displayed in the Customs House's public lobby. The project builds on the Region's model efforts to partner with universities for mutual benefit. Contact Teressia Blair, (404) 331-7775.

Charleston's U.S. Customs House is one of GSA's most significant historic buildings, and is a valuable laboratory for local preservation stu-

Foresight is 20/20 in West Palm Beach

The James Rogers U.S. Courthouse in West Palm Beach, Florida is a building with potential. It sits at the western gateway to the city, between two areas targeted for new development, and is the dominant federal presence locally. But it has little public interaction and is known mostly for the wall that surrounds it and its once-white façade, now darkened with age. With the recent efforts of Don Rollins, Director of the Miami Customer Service Center, and Rod Grant, the Property Manager, however, this will soon change. They joined consultant Project for Public Spaces and Central Office and Southeast Sunbelt Region staff from the Urban Development/Good Neighbor and First Impressions programs for an on-site brainstorming session in March. With several million dollars already invested in interior renovations over the last several years, and more planned for investment in the public areas of the building, the building's stewards hoped to do some advance planning so the building could become part of West Palm Beach's thriving downtown. PPS introduced participants to local partners, such as the Downtown Development Authority, and will produce a property management master plan that can guide future improvements. Such proactive planning impressed local officials, who hope to better incorporate the courthouse and its neighborhood, "Government Hill," into the fabric of the city. Contact Teressia Blair, (404) 331-7775.



Property managers hope the Rogers U.S. Courthouse in West Palm Beach can go from "island in the city" to rejuvenated urban gateway.

Putting the Public Back in Republic Square Park

December saw local and national partners come together in Austin, Texas to consider the future of Republic Square Park, an urban park that forms the center of a lively area of new development, including a new U.S. courthouse planned for the block immediately to its west. Since 1839, Republic Square Park has served variously as an auction site, a gathering place for the Mexican immigrant communities that lived nearby, and a public parking lot. It is now a landscaped park with little public activity. Led by Project for Public Spaces, representatives from the U.S. District Courts-Western District of Texas, GSA's Greater Southwest Region, GSA's Urban Development/Good Neighbor Program and local stakeholders including the City of Austin, the Downtown Austin Alliance, and Republic Square Partners, surveyed the area in and around the park, finding opportunities for active and passive

uses along the way. Participants agreed that the block of San Antonio Street to be closed between the new courthouse and Republic Square Park should become a civic asset, perhaps as an enhanced site for a nearby farmers market. Groups also expressed their hope that the site for the new courthouse could be used as an extension of the park while it awaits the start of construction. Performance space, art exhibits, and athletic fields were some of the many suggested temporary uses for the area left clear after the recent demolition of the Intel building shell that previously stood on the site. Contact Steve Skidmore, (817) 978-0347.

Erie U.S. Courthouse is Commended, Yet Again!

In March, the U.S. Courthouse in Erie, Pennsylvania was chosen as one of only 23 finalists in the Urban Land Institute's (ULI) Awards for Excellence: The Americas. Out of 167 entries from North and South America, the finalists were chosen for "the achievement of excellence in land use practice." Notably, ULI recognizes projects not just for excellence in design, but for "leadership, contribution to the community, innovations, public/private partnership, environmental protection, response to societal needs, and financial success." A visiting jury was impressed by the courthouse's approach to preservation and adaptive reuse, the successful delivery of the project within budget, and its continued success as a financial asset. Though ULI did not select Erie as one of the final eleven winners, the project was recognized during an awards ceremony at the ULI Spring Council Forum in early May, will be featured in a book highlighting all finalists, and will appear in *Urban Land* magazine. Contact Frank Giblin, (202) 501-1856.

Amy Biehl High School Keeps Winning

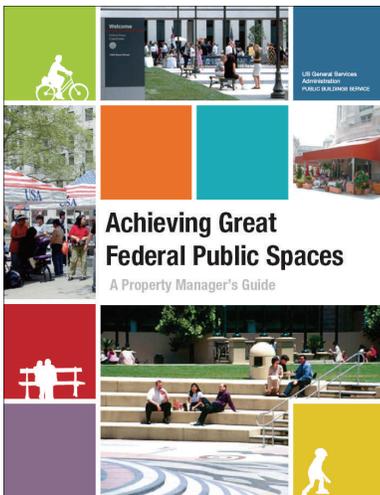
Last November, the Amy Biehl High School, which adaptively reuses a former Post Office and U.S. Courthouse in Albuquerque, was selected by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to receive the 2006 NTHP/ACHP Award for Federal Partnerships in Historic Preservation. Congratulations to those involved in this project on yet another amazing accomplishment!



NATIONAL NEWS

Achieving Great Federal Public Spaces: A Property Manager's Guide, Now Available!

In the quest for better public spaces in and around our federal buildings, GSA property managers are surely a secret weapon. No one is better equipped to understand our buildings, know their neighborhoods, and champion public space improvements. However, few people are as busy as our GSA property managers, who constantly juggle countless demands. A recently released publication from the Urban Development/Good Neighbor and First Impressions programs aims to help. *Achieving Great Federal Public Spaces: A Property Manager's Guide* provides an easy-to-use evaluation tool and guidebook for property managers interested in improving their interior and exterior public spaces — the plazas, sidewalks, lobbies, and grounds at their buildings. A brief audit tool helps to identify specific areas for improvement, while a comprehensive list of short-, medium-, and long-term upgrades shows how these opportunities can be successfully addressed. The guide also includes case studies of other GSA projects to show that, indeed, such changes can lead to vital public places. *Achieving Great Federal Public Spaces* is available now from Good Neighbor/Urban Development program staff and Regional Urban Development Officers. Contact Frank Giblin, (202) 501-1856.



Property managers now have an easy-to-use guide for public space improvement.

Download the Guide at www.gsa.gov/agfps.

WTOP (DC) radio interview with Deputy Commissioner Tony Costa:

<http://www.federalnewsradio.com/emedial/92371.wma>



The Site Security Design Guide

U.S. General Services Administration
Public Buildings Service

GSA's new *Site Security Design Guide* encourages collaboration across disciplines, long-term planning, and innovative thinking—to enhance safety and improve the quality of federal public spaces.

New Site Security Design Guide Released

Site security is a fundamental part of federal projects today, but one that presents a complex paradox. How do we maintain security to defend against the rare event, while ensuring the freedom and comfort that should characterize everyday life at our buildings? How do we maintain openness in the public realm, yet build security measures that meet required criteria? As landscape designers and architects have considered these questions to a greater extent over the last decade, so has GSA. And with the just-released *Site Security Design Guide*, GSA is encouraging a more compressive, strategic approach to the problem. Resulting from collaboration with security experts, landscape designers, architects, and federal officials, the new *Guide* presents a guiding philosophy for site security, a comprehensive description of elements organized by site area, and a process for introducing site security into the existing project planning process. In the last chapter, these aspects come together in a series of test cases based on real-life scenarios and typical project types. The *Guide* maintains an accessible format with many illustrations showing successful implementation. Contact Frank Giblin, (202) 501-1856.

The *Guide* is available upon request and is posted online at the Whole Building Design Guide (http://www.wbdg.org/ccb/GSAMAN/site_security_dg.pdf).

Reinvigorating the Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act

The Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act of 1976 revolutionized the way citizens interact with federal facilities, breathing new life into historic buildings, encouraging public activity in plazas, and bringing commercial tenants into federal office buildings and courthouses. Though it remains the legislation underlying all public use at government buildings, many citizens and government employees are not aware of its many nuances. A new Urban Policy Update, to be issued by the Urban Development/Good Neighbor program this winter, will provide answers to many frequent questions related to the Act. Like previous Urban Policy Updates concerning Executive Order 13006 and Business Improvement Districts, this takes a matter-of-fact approach, including examples of actual projects and events that have made use of this legislation. GSA associates and citizens hoping to use a federal building for a public use will find doing so easier than ever before. Contact Frank Giblin (202) 501-1856.



The City of Chicago has managed this successful weekly farmers market at the Chicago Federal Center for several years.

Farmers Markets at Federal Buildings

Farmer's markets are excellent amenities to downtown office districts, and they play an important role in supporting local farmers, encouraging sustainable farming, and promoting healthy diets. Although there are now several successful farmers markets at federal properties around the country, we feel that there are opportunities for many, many more. This is possible only where market operators looking to grow or establish markets at a federal property reach out to us. If you have suggestions about such opportunities, please drop us a line.

“There is a bit of insanity in dancing that does everybody a great deal of good.”

- Edwin Denby

Want to Find Out More? Have Ideas to Share?

We file each enews on our website at <http://www.gsa.gov/goodneighbor>. While you're there, you can check out other publications and policies, find the partners that can help GSA to be a good neighbor in your community, and get contact information for your local GSA representatives. Please email questions, comments, & contributions—as well as mailing list additions and deletions—to Frank Giblin at frank.giblin@gsa.gov.