

FEDERAL

DESIGN MATTERS

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"I am excited about this Second Federal Design Assembly because I see here the minds, the talents, and the courage to make design something exciting and challenging, something that gives younger people a wonderful feeling that, 'This is my world, my city, or my town, and I am excited to look at what my father has done.'

"A lot of people I know feel if you are interested in design you are probably not interested in the functional aspects of things. Well, nothing could be further from the truth. A good machine that works well is a beautiful proposition, a beautiful blending of motion and material.

"Convention is so powerful a force that, to break out of it, architects, designers, engineers, users, and all the rest of us must have courage. Let's make sure that we have courage. Let's make sure that we feel design is an acceptable proposition in our work and in our whole life experience."

from Secretary of Interior
Rogers C. B. Morton's
keynote address at the
Second Federal Design
Assembly

Special issue: It has been said that the First Federal Design Assembly was of real significance, simply because it was held at all, back in April of 1973—and that the Second, just recently come and gone, was important if only to account for all of the progress that has been achieved in the Federal Design Improvement Program. Over 700 Federal administrators attended the two-day Second Federal Design Assembly Sept. 11-12 keyed by Secretary Morton, and they reaped both practical and inspirational benefits in the day-long sessions covering four subject areas; namely, architecture, the landscaped environment, visual communications, and interior/industrial design.

One of the most exciting upshots of the Federal Design Assemblies has been the way states and cities are picking up the idea and running with it. This issue concerns itself with four highly successful Design Assemblies staged by two states, Colorado and Ohio, and by two cities: Rochester, New York, and Tulsa, Oklahoma. Here you will learn what they did and quite possibly, how their Design Assemblies might suggest a program of format that could be adapted to your agency or department.

Where better to stage a Colorado Design Assembly than in Colorado's Capitol?

The setting and the purpose couldn't have been more apposite. Here, swiveling at the desks in the state capitol building's newly refurbished chambers of the Colorado House of Representatives, sat another, quite different set of representatives. They were the state's administrators and designers who spend the money appropriated for design after the *other* Representatives agree it should be spent. Nearly 200 of them gathered to hear Merrie Lynn Vanderhoof, Governor John D. Vanderhoof's wife, say in her welcoming remarks, "This dialogue on the importance of design excellence is certainly in the best interest of everyone in this state."

How they did it. The Colorado Design Assembly was a model of professional zeal and wholesale involvement. It was coordinated from the beginning by the Colorado Council on the Arts and Humanities; and while

grants from both the Council and the National Endowment for the Arts assured the basic funding needed, the project also enjoyed two inestimable windfalls. One was the talent "freebies." Says the Council's Executive Director Robert N. Sheets, "We had tons of great volunteers."

The other windfall was Joanne Marks, the beneficiary of an NEA internship grant who happened to be working for the Colorado Council and was therefore nicely situated to assume the project coordinator's job.



What they did. Building on a key idea of the First Federal Design Assembly—a casebook of successful Federally initiated design projects—the Assembly committee undertook a massive scouting job to gain an overview of Colorado's design performance. They sent a letter to every state agency—close to 200 of them—requesting that each submit any relevant documentation of any agency-generated design effort it considered worth sharing. An astonishing 70 projects were submitted, over which the Assembly committee agonized before finally selecting seven particular ones for presentation and detailed analysis in the Assembly casebook. (Several of these are pictured, *opposite*.) Written by art critic Duncan Pollock, the casebook is the product of over 50 interviews conducted mostly by Pollock and Marks.

In selecting a design firm to do all of the Assembly's printed materials, the committee was similarly professional. Over a dozen firms were contacted and their interest in the Assembly job elicited. Five were given the budget figure and specs for the graphics work

and invited to submit proposals. The firm of Rieben & Craig got the job.

What the results were. One of the seven casebook studies, the Community College of Denver North Campus, was chosen for detailed presentation to the assembled administrators and designers. It proved to be a rich and persuasive study of the collaboration between the many dissimilar parties—the architects, college administrators, faculty, sociologists and students—whose mutually embraced objectives have produced an extraordinary and trail-blazing demonstration of environmental design. The physical plant, for example, will rely on solar energy for all heating, a remarkable fact not only because it will be the largest such installation ever attempted in the U. S., but also because it represents an unprecedented political triumph. Although the initial cost of solar heating will add \$736,000 in extra cost, the school's architects and administrators sold the Colorado legislature on two seldom-decisive benefits: (1) the long-term economies of the heating plant will offset the initial outlay; and (2) the immediate environment will remain clean and healthful.

On either side of a full day's devotion to case study evaluation and administrator-designer panel sessions, the Assembly produced divertissements for design folk. The night before at Denver Botanic Gardens, the Assembly crowd was treated to "The Agony and the Ecstasy," a multi-media design production co-sponsored by the Denver Center for the Performing Arts and Communication Arts of Boulder. What it was, all going on at the same time, was a good-design-bad-design slide show, buttressed by an avant music crew and two peripatetic pantomimics.

What, if they had it to do over, would Denver do differently? Since this Assembly barely beat our deadline, it's too early to say. So, too, is it too early to evaluate the follow-through. For sure, though, the Assembly's leadership would *not* change the way they took the battle to the designer-administrator partisans. Since practically every state agency sent a representative to the affair, and since some 70 of them took the trouble to submit design project data, you've got to conclude that somebody's doing something right out there in the Rockies.

These varied design projects were among the case studies presented at the Colorado and Ohio Design Assemblies.



Genesee Interchange Bridge, Lookout Mountain, Colorado



Villa Angela Academy, Cleveland, Ohio



Picnic Shell, Cherry Creek Marina, Colorado



Ohio Environmental Protection Agency Identification Program



Ohio makes an impressive case, through case histories, for spending design \$\$ wisely

Hats off to Ohio, the first state to hold its own Design Assembly. And quite an Assembly it was. Lest anyone among the goodly crowd that participated suppose that government at the state level was a nickel-and-dime affair, program chairman W. Byron Ireland set them straight—and straight off. "The state government of Ohio," he informed the designers and administrators at the Assembly's opening session, "pays more for construction each year than any corporation in the United States." For those who needed an exact figure in order to be properly impressed, Mr. Ireland supplied one: \$30.3 million was approved in 1973 by the state of Ohio for buildings, bridges, and roads.

In conceiving the Ohio Design Assembly, the Ohio Arts Council made no small plans. They called their event "Design. By Design," and the merest riffle through the elaborate casebook kit pictured here bespeaks the prodigious effort made to insure a meaningful experience for everyone who signed up to attend.

The Assembly occupied the better part of three days, opening in showy show biz fashion at the Ohio Theatre in Columbus, then picking up from there with a series of seminars on different design topics, plus handsomely mounted exhibits and displays. (Several of the seminar topics are reflected in the photos, *opposite*, which were taken from the Assembly's materials in the casebook kit.)

How Ohio did it. Unlike Colorado, where the day-to-day planning responsibility was assumed by the arts council, Ohio's Council farmed out the Design Assembly, so to say, to a private design firm. It was felt that for an organization with limited staff and an ambitious statewide program to minister to, the decision to go outside for professional help on the Design Assembly made a good deal of sense. In this case, the Council hired the firm of Foran & Greer, Inc., with G. William Greer serving as project director. With a grant from the Arts Council matched by another from the National Endowment for the Arts, these professionals, along with some dedicated volunteers who were pressed

into service, succeeded in generating a very great bang for a very few bucks.

What they did. The Ohio experience argues for putting such an amorphous and quixotic project as a Design Assembly on a solid business basis. For example, Foran & Greer agreed contractually to be responsible for executing this formidable grocery-list of tasks: to establish working relationships with various state officials (including the Governor's office); to develop the seminar programs; to organize the displays; to search for and recommend the case histories; to design the project's graphics materials; to work with the *ad hoc* committee members on program content and the recruiting of top speakers; and to scrounge for all



possible goods and services, if not on a gratis basis, then for the most attractive prices.

In short, what Foran & Greer contracted to do describes succinctly, for anyone entertaining the idea of staging a Design Assembly, what's involved.

What the results were. Each of the eight seminars attracted around 50 persons from design and government, a commendable turnout which was attributed in considerable measure to a colorful opening session whose highlights included: an original score composed especially for the Design Assembly by Carmon DeLeone, assistant conductor of the Cincinnati

Symphony Orchestra; a multi-media presentation carrying out the Assembly theme, "Design. By Design;" and a showing of industrial designer F. Eugene Smith's famous "Ugliness" slide show, which consists of a no-holds-barred selection of visual pollution examples from coast to coast. The auspicious kickoff session was also abetted by a concerted publicity effort which netted the Assembly many valuable columns of coverage in Ohio's newspapers and equally valuable time segments on radio and television.

What they learned. In their final summary of the Assembly project, Foran & Greer concluded that while the state-level Design Assembly did indeed serve as an effective rallying point to dramatize the role of design, they would recommend building on the first one before staging an encore. "We would rather see programs instituted," they wrote, "which would expose state officials to superior design on a *continuing* basis."

How to follow through. Among the post-Assembly recommendations offered by the Ohio leadership were these:

1. *Get the professionals involved.* Having managed to interweave at least five design disciplines in carrying out the Assembly programs, Foran & Greer urged that the five stick together and share their professional concerns on an ongoing basis with state agency heads and deputies. How? Through such devices as monthly luncheons, a design "clearing house" or resource center for state agency people, and through more effective lobbying, awards programs, and regularly held workshops.

2. *Keep the pressure on.* One good way, say Foran & Greer, is via the "push-pull" technique—by which they mean that a healthy push should be exerted from the very highest government level (namely, the Governor), while the pull is being carried out by the bureaucrats who are making constant design decisions in their agencies and departments.

One special admonition was sounded by the Assembly project coordinators. "Don't attempt to make designers of the officials who deal with design. Chances are, they have neither the time nor the inclination. What can be done, however, is to show these officials how to evaluate design performance."

A healthy offshoot of Rochester's Assembly: a city design program

Of all four state and local Design Assemblies summarized in this issue, Rochester's has produced the biggest *measurable* payoff. Today, barely half a year after the event, the city boasts a municipal design program. "Its purpose," said the city's PR director recently, "is to develop a total city government identification system which acknowledges the city's obligation to make itself visible to the people it serves."

Rochester now has an experienced graphics designer, Lee Green, who, for openers, will survey the needs of all city departments "in the areas of brochures and reports, internal and public forms, certificates, construction or project signs, slide presentations, displays, insignias, decals, stationery, mailings, TV presentations, building decor."



Rochester also plans to develop an educational program emphasizing the value of knowledgeable design decisions by department and bureau heads. Toward this end, a manual is being drawn up to outline the correct procedures for using established design programs. The city's graphics designer will help to make decision-making easier by setting up a file of design formats, a directory of outside design consultants and printers, as well as guidance data on pricing and production schedules.

Did a single Design Assembly bring about all this? Not really. Rochester

happens to be blessed with a strong arts council and a fine department of communication design at the Rochester Institute of Technology. Both the Council and the Institute chipped in with talent and resources to make the Assembly a success.

Then, too, Rochester was already sold on municipal design awareness, largely because of its "Urbanarium." This unique activity exists within the Institute structure "to create a new kind of classroom for citizenship education that will stimulate constructive community involvement." The Urbanarium's director, R. Roger Remington, headed the Design Assembly's planning committee.

The entire Assembly was packed into a single morning, which makes a certain amount of good planning sense at the municipal level of government; city officials who deal with design were able to pick the panel which most concerned their interests—architecture, landscaped environment, visual communication, or interior/industrial design—and spend the morning with experts.

Rochester's keynoter was Eric Larrabee, executive director of the New York State Council on the Arts, who reminded a receptive audience that design is less a matter of money than of intelligence and discipline. "We have not a poverty of means," he declared, "but an absolutely overpowering luxury of means. In the United States, almost anybody can build anything. The result is a kind of St. Vitus dance, in which all of the elements are at war with one another. Everyone is off doing his own thing, with complete chaos resulting."

After the Tulsa Assembly, the playback's the thing

For other cities considering the idea of a Design Assembly, Tulsa and Rochester offer contrasting approaches. Rochester squeezed its program into one morning, running all of its panels concurrently. Not Tulsa. There, each of four panels had an entire morning or afternoon to itself and thus was able to address the full Assembly audience. Perhaps that's why each panel coined a catchy program theme: for visual communication, it was, "The Eyes Have It;" for landscaped environment,

"Everybody Needs His Greens;" for architecture, "A Lot More Than Four Walls and A Roof;" and for interiors, "What Really Goes On Behind Closed Doors."

The Assembly's sponsor was the Tulsa Arts Commission, which wisely made the event a multi-jurisdictional affair. It received financial assistance from the Oklahoma Arts & Humanities Council, and design decision-makers were invited not only from the city but also from county and state.



What Tulsa's results were. When the Assembly (or, officially, the "Design Awareness Workshop") was over, the participants were asked to complete a 10-point questionnaire to learn what they'd gained from the experience. In answer to the question, "Do you feel that another Workshop should be held next year?" all but one respondent replied "Yes." To gain personal impressions, the sponsors asked in what specific areas could Tulsa improve its "design effectiveness." These were some of the replies:

"Street and building signs need a standard format."

"Sign control."

"Set up a roster of designers who are willing to do small projects for \$30 to \$50."

"More speakers, slides, and projects. More opportunities for individuals to interact. Perhaps field trips. Should direct workshop to individual (government) departments."

Seen from a distance, in both space and time, Tulsa's workshop experience seems peculiarly effective for many other places in the country where no megalopolis exists and the population is thinly spread over a vast swatch of geography. Had not Tulsa shared its project with county and state, its impact doubtless would have been much less.

And what else, besides Design Assemblies all over the map, is new?

Readers of past issues will recall that the Federal Design Improvement Program is made up of four separate initiatives, coordinated by the National Endowment for the Arts. One is, of course, the Federal Design Assembly (with such happy spinoffs as described in this issue). The other three are the Federal Architecture Study, the Federal Graphics Improvement Program, and the Civil Service Commission's comprehensive effort to upgrade Federal design by attracting, holding, and rewarding top-quality design talent. All three are moving briskly ahead, as the following progress reports affirm:

Federal Architecture Study. Architects, to a person, should find four research-writing projects now being topped off of compelling interest. The first deals with multiple-use concepts for Federal buildings and draws heavily on program director Lois Craig's firsthand observations of Canada's implementation of multiple-use, which has become official government policy up there. The second study will aim to clear up false assumptions about the Federal government's role in encouraging architectural competitions, and to present them as one more desirable selection alternative. The third study will address the potential for meeting

government space needs by adapting historic buildings, i.e. renovating the Old Post Office building for multiple-use. And the fourth major project underway promises to become an architectural best-seller because of the subject: a visual history of Federal architecture in America. When published (no date is set), the work will contain not only extensive graphics coverage of buildings but also an account of land development and subsidy policies of the Federal government as they have influenced architecture and construction.

Federal Graphics Improvement. The progress chart of agency participation in this program goes up, up. By year's end, over one-third of all major Federal agencies will have had their graphics efforts evaluated by a panel of distinguished professionals. The latest to join the club are the Department of Justice, Small Business Administration, Federal Trade Commission, Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission, and the Council of State Governments.

Program Director Jerry Perlmutter advises that if your agency has not yet taken advantage of this opportunity to submit your graphics for expert evaluation, all that's necessary to start the wheels turning is a phone call to him: 202-382-3004.

Civil Service Commission. Having

issued a landmark report titled "Excellence Attracts Excellence," the Commission is now tooling up to implement the report's admirable theme. Outstanding professionals from the eight design disciplines involved will assist in a heavy recruiting program on the campuses of top schools next January and February. A recruiting package is being designed to promote the campaign. It will consist of a poster/announcement, a "non-frightening" form requesting basic educational and professional information from job candidates, a "skills-knowledge-abilities" form, and a request for ten slides of subject matter in a candidate's portfolio. The Commission expects to print a whopping 25,000 packages—and that's not the end of it. Announcements will be placed in nine trade journals soliciting the interest of design professionals; the combined circulation of them is 325,000. The actual period of application for job candidates is tentatively slated for March 1-15, 1975, though the Commission is prepared to extend it if the traffic warrants.

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