

Williamson Shriver Architects wins award for Mingo Central



Julia R Goad|Daily News

Teresa Jones, Principal at MCHS, told architect Ted Shriver, “I never lose that ‘Aha’ moment when I come up the hill to the school.”

Julia Roberts Goad

Staff Writer

Williamson Shriver Architects, Inc. was awarded an Honor Award for Excellence in Architectural Design for the design of Mingo Central High School.

The AIA-WV awards program recognizes projects and details that demonstrate exemplary achievement of design. Entries are not judged in competition with each other, but rather by measuring the architect’s performance against each project’s potential. Thus, projects of ordinary program or modest budget can merit an award based on the architect’s skill in optimizing the design opportunity.

As Southern West Virginia is comprised generally of rugged terrain with steep mountains and deep river valleys generally subject to flooding, large tracts of land to accommodate the state standards for new high school construction are difficult to find. The Mingo Central project site, however, provided an unusual opportunity not typically available in West Virginia’s southern coalfields. The project was located on a mountaintop removal site.

Ted Shriver, vice-president of Williamson Shriver, recently visited Mingo Central. He said the jury that voted to award the school’s design an Award for Excellence didn’t realize the specific challenges faced with this particular design.

“Interestingly, one juror said he would have liked to see the surroundings the school was situated in,” Shriver said. “They didn’t judge on the land up here, just on the use of space and the curriculum of the school and the design.”

Mingo Central High School is a realization of the need to replace four aging high schools with an educational facility centered on offering skills to compete in the international marketplace of the 21st century.

This 850 student building includes basic skills classrooms combined with applied and advanced computer labs, science, math, communications, and a comprehensive career and technology center.

The land, as well as construction to create the site, was donated to the project by a local coal company through the Mingo County Development Authority. Additionally, the coal company donated construction of a twelve mile section of the King Coal Highway (future interstate 73/74), which serves as the access road to the school.

The 35 acre developed site area currently contains the new school and a 4,000 seat James H. "Buck" Harless football stadium and the Shewey Wellness Center. Eventually, outside sports facilities will be expanded to include varsity baseball, softball, track, and soccer fields.

The architectural plan took its form from the desire to separate the building into zones based upon usage. The academic zone is oriented around a central court which provides natural light to nearly all of the teaching spaces. The comprehensive career and technology center is located remotely at the south end of the plan.

Of particular importance are features of the plan that emphasize the ability to share large portions of the building with the community for after-school use. The dining room, media center, gymnasium, and performing arts areas are centrally located in the plan with convenient access to parking areas, and are designed in a way which allows after hours usage while securing the academic and career center wings.

The gymnasium, auxiliary gymnasium, and locker rooms were placed one level down from the main level of the building. This was done to allow the building to conform to the slope of the site left at the conclusion of the mountaintop removal process. Additionally, this offered the added benefit of reducing the apparent mass of these large building elements from the new highway. Additional areas of interest in the building include a 675 seat auditorium, a 2,000 seat oversized gymnasium with upper-level running track, a commercial foods careers training facility, pre-engineering lab, health careers lab, and a graphic arts careers classroom.

Williamson Shriver Architects, Inc. is an award-winning, 18 person, multi-disciplinary Charleston design firm founded in 1967. While specializing in educational planning and design, they provide architectural and engineering design services to a diverse client base throughout West Virginia.

With construction value exceeding one billion dollars over the company's history, the size and scale of their projects have ranged from detailed designs for small interior renovations to large multi-million dollar new schools and other facilities.