

Architectural Design Competition for High School Students

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SUMMARY

AIA Toledo proves community interaction is good for the professional and the profession. AIA Toledo inspires students through its annual High School Design Competition which pairs architects as mentors with local high school students. The competition introduces students to the architecture profession and design and community planning theories.

HIGH SCHOOL DESIGN COMPETITION: AN AIA TOLEDO TRADITION SINCE 1950

For more than 50 years, AIA Toledo has held an annual architectural design competition for high school students within the component's service area. The competition introduces the students to the architectural design process. Each student works with an architect mentor on a potential real-life community project. Architects select projects that will help students to develop an appreciation for the value of good design as well as an interest in the profession of architecture.

The High School Design Competition gives students valuable experience in working with architects on tangible local products. The program is supported by AIA members, teachers, parents, and the community. In addition, support from many corporations over the years such as Toledo Edison and Owens-Illinois Inc., as well as from small businesses such as Becker Impressions, help underwrite the expenses of putting on the competition and awards program. Affiliated organizations, such as the American Society of Landscape Architects and the Toledo Museum of Art, also participate.

As many as 205 students from 25 urban, rural, and suburban high schools have submitted entries in a single year. Since 1950 when the program began, more than 6,000 students and their families have gained a better understanding of the role of architects and the value of good design.

The contest has had a major impact on the architecture profession, especially in the Toledo

area. Many local architects, AIA members, and partners in local architecture firms have participated in the competition. Most architects in the Toledo area have served as mentors and leaders in the competition. Some competitors have gone on to other design-oriented professions.

The design contest has generated local and national media attention from newspapers like the *Toledo Blade* and magazines like *Progressive Architecture*.

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

Projects Are Developed

Each year, the program is organized by two cochairs, one of whom has served the year before, thus providing leadership continuity and experience. The cochairs develop an architectural project type and program to guide the students' projects. Project types have included museums, community centers, a park ranger station, a church, and a fast-food restaurant. Each project has a real site in the Toledo area. The competition encourages green design and integration of building and landscape design.

Every September, the AIA sends a letter of invitation to high schools within a 50-mile radius of Toledo. Students in grades 9–12 are eligible to participate. There is usually a senior component, with additional requirements for high school seniors. Other students may complete the senior requirement if they wish.

For most projects, a real "client" helps the cochairs to develop the program, speaks with student competitors at a kick-off meeting, and attends the awards program. Students are instructed not to speak with the client between the kick-off meeting and the awards program. Questions from students or instructors are forwarded to the cochairs, and the answers are shared with all competitors.

Architects Work with Students

Local architects (43 volunteers in 2004) are assigned to each high school, and they make weekly visits to mentor students. An optional Rendering Day is held midway through the competition, with architects on hand to help students with layout,

perspective, computer rendering, and model building.

Prizes Are Awarded

The award judges typically include the past year's president of AIA Toledo, a past competition cochair, a "client" representative, AIA member architects, and members of the Young Architects' Forum (YAF). Prizes are awarded in many categories, including first prizes and honorable mentions for seniors, juniors, and sophomores. The competition awarded more than \$7,000 in prize and scholarship money in 2004.

Scholarships, awards, and prizes are contributed from AIA Toledo resources; a component scholarship fund in the name of one of the founders of the competition, Orville Bauer; and endowed funds through the University of Toledo Foundation in the name of prominent architects from the component, Edward E. Packer and Richard Valasek. AIA Toledo presents the awards at a dinner and ceremony attended by students, teachers, parents, friends, and AIA members.

Students are not required to build models, but those who do are eligible for a separate prize. Members of the AIA Toledo YAF and students from the Toledo Museum of Art assist them by constructing a site model in which students place their models for display and evaluation. YAF members also judge the models.

The local chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects has teamed with AIA Toledo to sponsor, mentor, judge, and award prizes for a separate landscape architecture component.

In addition, local architect and nationally renowned artist, Harold A. Roe, AIA, provides awards for overall graphic presentation. The first prize includes a piece of Roe's artwork.

BENEFITS

During its 54-year existence, the competition has contributed to the profession by inspiring students to consider careers in architecture and design; enhancing the public image of architecture and the AIA; fostering the teaching of architecture at the secondary school level; encouraging architects to mentor students; and encouraging firms to donate funds for scholarships and awards to students.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Sandra Migani Wall, PhD, executive director at AIA Toledo, 419-266-2428 or execdirector@aiatoledo.org.

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

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| 22.08.03 | Design Competitions as a Catalyst for Community Action |
| 22.08.04 | Kids in Architecture: A Grade 5 Curriculum |
| 22.08.07 | Architecture: It's Elementary! A K–5 Curriculum |

Feedback

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Key Terms

- Leadership
- Associations
- Design associations
- Architecture associations
- The American Institute of Architects
- AIA components