

Architects Lead Community Efforts to Recover from a Forest Fire

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SUMMARY

In July 2004 a devastating forest fire burned on Mt. Lemmon, 35 miles north of Tucson, destroying the village of Summerhaven. Local residents formed the Mt. Lemmon Restoration Committee to coordinate the many facets of recovery from the disaster. Recognizing the value of architects, the committee selected Edward T. Marley, AIA, then president of AIA Southern Arizona, as chair. With Marley as the driving force, the committee launched three projects: development of a master plan, refinement of new building codes, and a resource fair for victims.

A MASTER PLAN FOR REBUILDING

Turning tragedy into opportunity, Brent L. Davis, Hon. AIA, executive director of AIA Southern Arizona, contacted the Pima County administrator to offer assistance. The county needed a master plan to rebuild the commercial area of Summerhaven, 90 percent of which had been destroyed by the fire. Pima County decided to fund a \$10,000 master planning effort coordinated by the AIA component. Marley's architecture partner, Phillip E. Swaim, AIA, directed the formation of the Summerhaven Planning Committee. The goal was to develop design guidelines as stipulated by the new zoning requirements and to produce, with stakeholder input, a new master plan for the small commercial area of Summerhaven. The county was especially interested in adding more public parking and a visitor's center.

The AIA was able to bring together property owners, landscape architects, planners, civil engineers, county staff members, and residents to participate in an open planning process. The resulting master plan serves as the blueprint for the genesis of Summerhaven's new commercial area. The AIA achieved the goal, and Pima County officials were pleased with the effort.

AN EXPEDITED CODE REVIEW

Working with the Pima County Development Services staff, the AIA, under the leadership of Marley and the Restoration Committee, assisted in

the review of building and zoning codes. The goal of the review was twofold: to assist Pima County in a fast-track review of the International Urban-Wildland Interface Code and to modify the county zoning code to permit the reconstruction of homes on substandard lots. By quickly adopting a building code and redefining certain aspects of the zoning code, Pima County was able to ensure safe reconstruction of the mountain community and the more than 300 homes destroyed by the fire.

AIA Southern Arizona put together a subcommittee of architects, engineers, contractors, fire department officials, and Pima County staff to undertake laborious review of the Urban-Wildland Interface Code and amend it to meet the needs of the Mt. Lemmon restoration process. In addition, AIA members joined other community professionals to review and revise the county zoning code to allow for safe development on Mt. Lemmon. These reviews—which would normally take months or years to accomplish—were completed in a few weeks.

RESOURCE FAIR

Immediately after the fire, construction companies, contractors, architects, product suppliers, government agencies, and nonprofit groups began to target individuals who had lost their dwellings in the fire. The AIA decided to develop a more effective way to match suppliers with consumers. Davis and his staff put together a resource fair to bring vendors and service providers together in one central location.

The goal was to develop and produce a major trade show and resource fair. To meet this goal, AIA Arizona staff members procured the Tucson Community Center exhibit hall, designed a trade show with a booth layout map, and began to sell booths to interested parties. In less than three weeks, the 75-booth show was sold out. Members of the Mt. Lemmon community and the general public were invited to participate at no charge. An educational component was included, with seminars

offered by mortgage lenders, architects, materials suppliers, and others.

The event, which included construction of a log cabin in the community center parking lot, attracted more than 400 people. Vendors were pleased, and the Mt. Lemmon community was grateful for the AIA's efforts. As an added benefit, many vendors offered door prizes, which were given to fire victims.

CONCLUSION

To aid in fire-recovery efforts, AIA Southern Arizona undertook three separate projects with three distinct goals. Not only did each project meet its goals, but the AIA's activities also received excellent press coverage. Marley was interviewed on the Tucson PBS station for *Arizona Illustrated*, a local newsmagazine program. Marley also was interviewed by FOX-11 News during the resource fair. The work of the Restoration Committee was featured in many newspaper articles, and reporter Tom Beal of the *Arizona Daily Star* attended most committee meetings.

The AIA was pleased to develop and participate in successful community activities that assisted many people in need and demonstrated the value of architects working with local government to aid recovery from a major natural disaster.

AIA Southern Arizona has stayed involved, with Marley serving on the Mt. Lemmon FireWise Committee and helping to develop its fire management plan. He continues to chair the Mt. Lemmon Restoration Committee. More than 70 homes are currently under construction or in design, and the Mt. Lemmon General Store reopened on the first anniversary of the fire.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Brent L. Davis, Hon. AIA, executive director of AIA Arizona, 520-323-2191 or brent@aia-arizona.org.

In addition, see these online resources:

2003 International Urban-Wildland Interface Code

It contains provisions addressing fire spread, accessibility, defensible space, water supply, and more concerning buildings constructed near wildland areas. Available as a free download (PDF file) to communities. Contact the International Code Council (www.iccsafe.org/news/uwic.html) or purchase from the ICC Store (www.iccsafe.org).

Pima County Aspen Fire Recovery

www.aspenfirerecovery.org

Many documents related to the fire and the planning

process are available on this Web site in PDF format, including the "Graphic Companion for the International Urban-Wildland Interface Code for Pima County, Arizona," developed by Rick Bright, AIA, a board member of AIA Southern Arizona.

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

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

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| 22.08.02 | Community Leadership in Urban Design |
| 22.08.05 | New York New Visions: A Model for Inclusive Community Planning |
| 22.08.09 | Architects Design Rebirth of a Community |

Feedback

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Key Terms

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