



**Phone:** 452-5377

**Date:** November 23, 2009

**To:** Mayor Degginger and City Councilmembers

**From:** Patrick Foran, Director – Parks & Community Services

**Subject:** Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center: First Year Summary

In October, the Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center (MSEEC) completed its first year of operations. The facility has met or exceeded all established program goals, with over 25,000 visitors having utilized the facility in the past year, and the facility itself has received critical acclaim for its design and programming. MSEEC is a collaboration between the City of Bellevue and Pacific Science Center. This partnership brings year-round education and interpretation of freshwater ecosystems, wetland ecology, environmental stewardship, and the effect of urban development to adults, youth, and families. This report summarizes this past year's experience.

### **Programs**

- Approximately 11,000 students participated in Pacific Science Center (PSC) programs, which provide children of all ages and backgrounds the opportunity for a hands-on learning experience. Prior to expansion, PSC had reached program capacity at 8,000 students annually.
- The City of Bellevue served approximately 10,000 additional drop-in visitors.
- Approximately 3,500 people children and adults participated in City of Bellevue Park Ranger and Adult Education Programs.
- Approximately 3,000 visitors attended on-site facility rental programs.

The partnership between the City and PSC creates a program delivery model intended to inspire lifelong awareness, understanding, and appreciation for stewardship of the natural world, and have been designed to support the mission and goals of both organizations. Some of the most popular programs include:

- *Family Discovery Series* – including nature walks, ranger programs, movie nights, and canoe tours.
- *Adult Enrichment Series* – including nature photography, wildlife viewing, and living green.
- *Special Events* – including Natural Resources Week and Greenway Days.
- *Science Center Programs* – including Wild B'Earthdays, Scouts in the Wild, summer and winter camps, KCLS special programs, haunted hikes, school science programs, teacher workshops, Slough sleep-ins, and various internship programs.

## Media Coverage

The MSEEC has appeared in a number of local publications such as the *Bellevue Reporter*, *Seattle P-I*, *The Seattle Times*, and *It's Your City*. It was also featured as the Project of the Month in the June '09 *Daily Journal of Commerce* and on Bellevue Television's *It's Your City*. It has also been featured in the following regional and national publications:

- *Alaska Airlines Magazine* – October 2008
- *Modern Steel Construction Magazine* – September 2009
- *Green Source: The Magazine of Sustainable Design* – November-December 2009
- *King County GreenTools Newsletter* – Featured Project 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2008

## Awards & Recognitions

The MSEEC has received the following recognition including:



*US Green Building Council – Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) GOLD certification.* This represents the first LEED-certified City project, one of only eight LEED certified projects in Bellevue, the first gold-level LEED project in the city, and one of only 53 gold-certified projects statewide.



*The Seattle Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) 2009 Honor Award* – one of only four projects honored statewide, and described as a “vivid learning laboratory.”



*King County – 2009 Excellence in Green Building Award* – honored for green building techniques, site sensitive development, community and science education, and ecosystem protection.



*Washington Recreation & Parks Association (WRPA) – 2009 Spotlight Award: Best Facility for Population Greater than 35,000* – for outstanding facility design resulting in positive community impact.



*American Council of Engineering Companies – Washington (ACEC) – 2009 Bronze Award for Future Value to the Profession* – for innovative engineering and construction systems.



*King County – 2008 Excellence in Building Green Award* - recognizing public facility planning and design teams that reflect environmental sustainability.



*Cascade Land Conservancy (CLC) – 2007 John Stanford Education Achievement Award* – for the commitment and dedication to children and environmental education, recognizing innovative projects or programs that engender an appreciation for the natural environment through hands-on experiences.

## **Staff Recognition**

Many individuals from the City and PSC have worked tirelessly behind-the-scenes to create the facility, programs, and partnerships that exist today, and that has resulted in the recognitions received by the MSEEC. The following deserve special mention:

- **Ken Kroeger**, Project Manager. Beginning in 2000 when the project was proposed adjacent to the South Bellevue Park & Ride, Ken worked effectively with City and Science Center staffs, architectural and engineering teams, environmental engineers, permit review agencies, and construction contractors to realize the City's vision.
- **Christina Dyson-Farrell**, Park Ranger, is responsible for the daily operations of the MSEEC, which includes staffing for the visitor center; monitoring use of the community building; developing interpretive programs, exhibits and brochures; coordinating on-site volunteer stewardship efforts; and acting as the direct liaison between the City and PSC.
- **Apryl Brinkley**, PSC Programs Manager, has been responsible for the development and delivery of the Science Center programming efforts at the MSEEC since 2002. She and her staff were an integral component of the development of the new MSEEC, providing valuable input to ensure an effective marriage of facility design and function.
- **Kevin Husemann**, Natural Resource Operations Supervisor. Kevin and the Natural Resource Division Crews oversee the landscape and trail maintenance activities for the MSEEC and Mercer Slough Nature Park. He is a key player in helping ensure that the ongoing appearance and functions of the site meet the needs of staff, visitors, and program participants.

What began as an idea over 30 years ago, and adopted by Council as part of the Mercer Slough Nature Park Master Plan in 1990, the first phase of the Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center is now complete. Our partnership with the Pacific Science Center, started in 1992, has been brought to new levels with this expansion. The steadfast support from Council, together with the help of many public and private partners, has been instrumental in achieving this vision for the community.

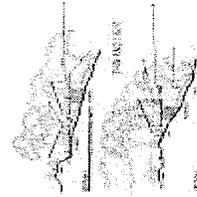


## HONOR AWARDS



Grand Teton Discovery and Visitor Center

This Wyoming project was described by jurors as a significant asset to the future of our national park service. "The national park is the star, but somehow this building really holds its own -- it is a timeless fit for that site."



Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center

This well-crafted, LEED Gold certified public project was a stand out because of its deep connection to its environment, distinguished by the ecological systems operating across building and landscape. Jurors described the project as a "vivid learning laboratory."

### Awards

Honor Awards

Merit Awards

Commendation

Citation

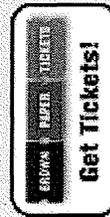
### Envisioned

### Realized

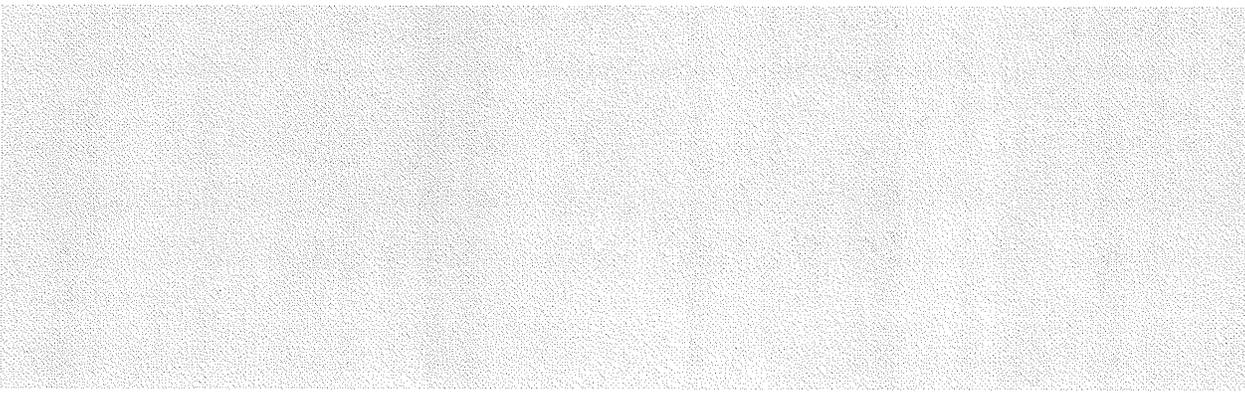
AIA Honor Awards  
for Washington Architecture

Monday, November 9

Benaroya Hall

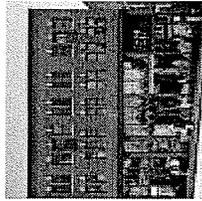


More info



Vancouver Convention Centre West, Expansion

Describing the design as "the way a convention center should be done," the jurors were impressed with how the project relates to the city and the water, as well as the inclusion of sustainable elements such as the green roof which "feels more like a rooftop park."



Wing Luke Asian Museum

Jurors were unanimously impressed, noting that "this remarkable renovation defines architecture in a very holistic and sustainable way – remembering its past while projecting its possibilities into the future."

Good design makes a difference



A Chapter of the American Institute of Architects

## Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center

Jones & Jones Architects and Landscape Architects

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This project is about trees and water and respect. As an education facility focused on the study of wetland ecosystems, this (LEED Gold) Center teaches by design and example. It immerses students in a thriving upland tree canopy overlooking a major urban wetland, while exhibiting principles and techniques that help keep the wetlands intact.

This wetland ecosystem is the filter to everything that enters it from uphill, with many natural vessels to carry water and nutrients. By creating a place that respects these factors, the Center is integrated with the wetland organism, a part of the system rather than apart from it.

Preserving the tree canopy meant footprints of no more than 2,500 square feet. By analyzing voids in the forest, the design team identified "rooms" for each of eight structures, four of which barely touch the land. Using helical pilings and concrete pile caps, the structures cantilever over the land and up into the tree canopy. This allows water, air, and vegetation to flow beneath, thus sustaining the fragile, sloped site and the land's natural vessels. Building volumes and decks are staggered, offset and pierced to accommodate trees and allow the buildings to interact with their surroundings.

While the buildings comprise 9,500 square feet of usable space, less than one quarter of the square footage touches the ground. It is hard to quantify the effects of this footprint reduction at grade. What is the value of seeing eye-to-eye with a Pileated Woodpecker? What is it worth to design buildings so that, in 15 or 20 years, the water, bugs and birds don't know the buildings are there? The Center is a place to explore these questions.

### Jury Comments:

This well-crafted, LEED Gold certified public project was a stand out because of its deep connection to its environment, distinguished by the ecological systems operating across building and landscape. Jurors described the project as a "vivid learning laboratory."

### Awards

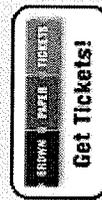
- Honor Awards
- Merit Awards
- Commendation
- Citation

### Envisioned

### Realized

AIA Honor Awards  
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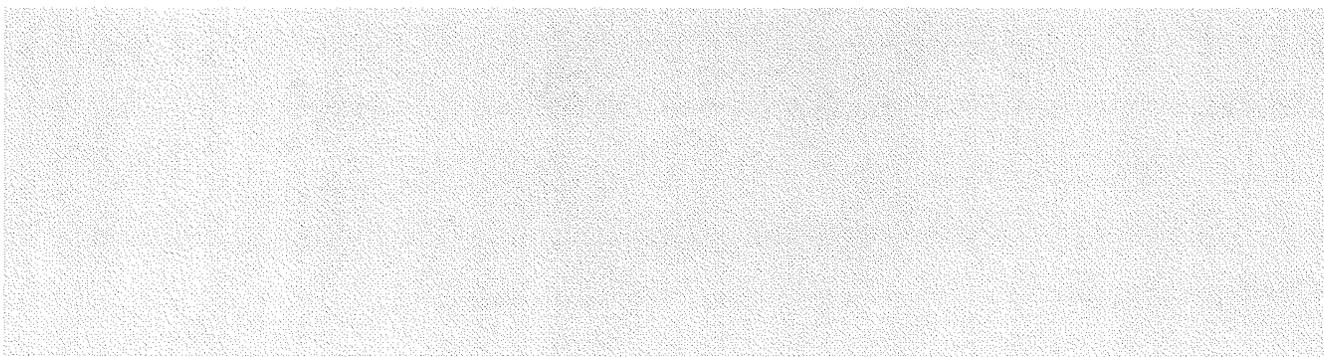
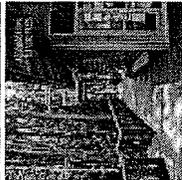
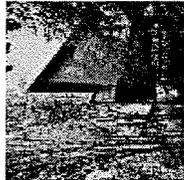
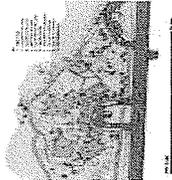
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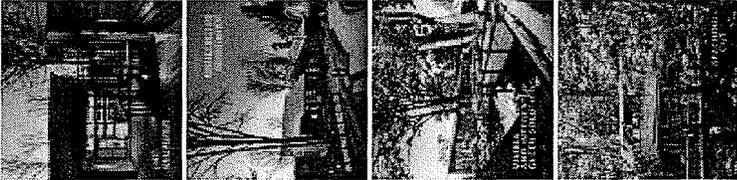
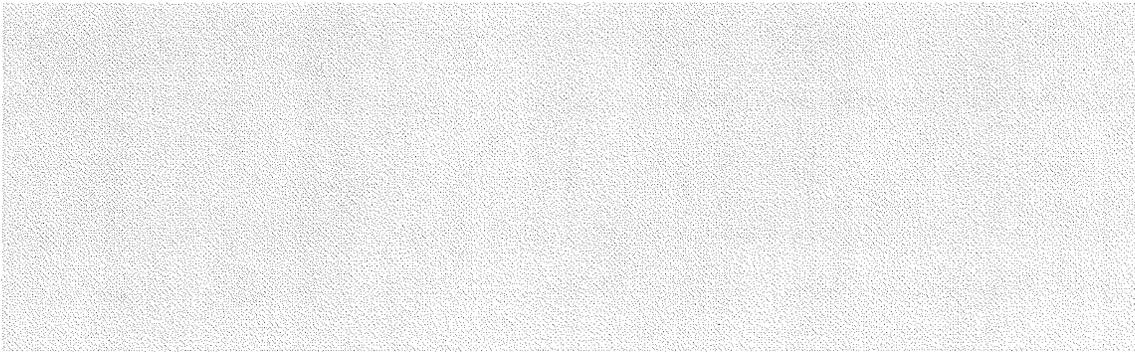


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