

Carl Small Town Center **S U M M A R Y** for Outdoor Classroom

Purpose

The Carl Small Town Center requests grant funding to design and build an outdoor classroom for East Oktibbeha County High School (EOCHS) in Oktibbeha County, Mississippi.

History

EOCHS is located in the rural community of Oktoc, MS. The school has a history of receiving little funding and achieving low test scores. In an effort to improve the quality of education and consolidate resources, the Oktibbeha county schools underwent a merger which consolidated the two county high schools. Alexander High and Moor High became East Oktibbeha County High School at the Moor High location. Students from Alexander High School now attend East Oktibbeha County High School at its arch rival's former home, Moor High. Minor building improvements were made shortly after the merger occurred. However, very little has been done to facilitate the merger of these two distinct groups of people which have strong allegiances to their former schools. The impetus for the outdoor classroom is an effort to continue to bridge the gap between the two schools, ultimately providing a new, shared identity and vision.

Goals

The goal of the project is to provide EOCHS students, faculty, alumni and the surrounding community with an outdoor educational facility that will stimulate the students' education, help bridge the gap between merged school entities, and give EOCHS and the community a sense of pride and ownership in their school and the education received there.

Budget

The budget for this project totals \$110,000. This figure includes \$90,000 for materials and construction costs. Additional materials are projected to be donated by local industries, but are minimal in scope and quantity. The EOCHS Alumni have agreed to supply much of the labor for the construction of the project, but monies are needed to supplement what they are unable to accomplish. The remainder of the budget, \$20,000, covers research, planning, design, and construction administration costs for the project. The Carl Small Town Center is asking that you consider funding this project for \$80,000.

Timeline

Consultation for this project began in January 2003 and is scheduled to be designed and built by December 31, 2005.

The Carl Small Town Center (CSTC) is a non-profit organization within the College of Architecture at Mississippi State University. It was established in 1979, responding to its geographical position within a rural landscape and to the school's focus on the American Small Town. It is our vision that by raising an awareness of the physical environment through research and design we may strengthen and empower communities to promote a prosperous and enduring livelihood. It is our belief that the creation of the outdoor classroom at East Oktibbeha County High School is one such opportunity to achieve this vision.

Chartered purpose of CSTC:

"It is our vision that by raising an awareness of the physical environment through research and design we may strengthen and empower communities to promote a prosperous and enduring livelihood."

The Carl Small Town Center (CSTC) is a non-profit organization within the College of Architecture at Mississippi State University. The Carl Small Town Center develops interactive educational projects in local communities and researches the issues of small towns and communities across the nation. The Carl Small Town Center provides assistance to communities with community planning and economic development issues, building renovation projects, design guidelines, design-build projects, and projects that address human service needs. Additionally, The Carl Small Town Center offers educational programs to the public. The mission of the Center is to:

- Influence public policy on the built environment,
- Provide towns and communities with a current and active resource center for design issues,
- Show communities the ability of the design process to discover underlying assets and obstacles to growth and development,
- Encourage the development of public space and life within towns and communities,
- Promote the maintenance of healthy and flourishing towns and communities,
- Expand the role of architectural research and education in small town design,
- Promote the role of architectural research and education in small town design,
- Promote collaboration between community members, students and faculty to tackle the problems and opportunities in small towns,
- Become a national forum for issues of small town design.

The Carl Small Town Center believes in the value of good design, which brings order and meaning to the built environment, in support of a higher quality of life. With focused attention to the quality of the built environment, communities can become self-sufficient, prosperous and increase their economic value, thus insuring a healthy future. The Carl Small Town Center is committed to partnering with its faculty, students, alumni and other Mississippi agencies with citizens of our small towns. In our work we find that small towns provide rich opportunities for architecture students to learn; towns benefit from focused attention to their problems. The Mississippi landscape offers many opportunities

to address a range of real needs in small towns and rural communities, and through them provide opportunities for faculty, students, and practitioners to explore an expanded role for architectural education. Architecture is strengthened by embracing a larger mission which involves others.

History of The Carl Small Town Center:

The Carl Small Town Center was established in 1979, responding to its geographical position within a rural landscape and to the school's focus on the American Small Town. The Center for Small Town Research and Design (now The Carl Small Town Center) was officially dedicated in October 1979, making formal a commitment to the American small town which was identified from the day the College of Architecture at Mississippi State University began operation in 1974. The College perceived, from the beginning, that Mississippi and the surrounding region, comprised primarily of small towns, offered a setting where small town problems and their solutions could be identified, discussed, studied and illustrated.

Gradually, as the College matured, small towns were investigated through student projects as part of the classroom and design studio experience, by means of grants and contracts provided to students and faculty by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Mississippi Council for the Humanities, numerous Mississippi towns, individual Mississippi architects, and through private support of individual faculty willing to give their time and energy to the Center.

Today, the Center continues its mission through grants and contracts from organizations such as the Appalachian Regional Commission, the CREATE Foundation, The Hearin Foundation, and, as always, the dedication and Energy of numerous School of Architecture students, Mississippi small towns, private architects, and concerned citizens.

Purpose of grant:

The Carl Small Town Center requests grant funding to design and build an outdoor classroom for East Oktibbeha County High School (EOCHS) in Oktibbeha County, Mississippi. The facility will incorporate more than a singular space for educating students out of doors. An educational walking trail will serve as an extension of the classroom, incorporating learning stations along its path. The path will serve as a means of recreation around the school grounds as well as a link between the school and the outdoor classroom.

By what steps does the CSTC propose to accomplish creating the outdoor classroom?

PHASE ONE:

Consultation

The CSTC held meetings in the Spring of 2003 to establish the needs and wants of both students and alumni.

At the meetings with Alumni, the CSTC learned about the vision that the Alumni have for the outdoor classroom project. They remember the outdoor landscape surrounding the school as being a social gathering place when they were in school. They see the outdoor classroom as a way to celebrate their school experience and to promote the importance of education to current and future students at the school.

Many alumni have excelled in their careers and they feel that this structure will be testament to their commitment to the school and inspire students to "Reach Higher."

The CSTC met with a group of student leaders and student artists to develop the design of the outdoor classroom and to hear about the students' ideas for the project. During these meetings, the CSTC educated the students about architectural design and the students then generated drawings and models to convey their ideas. The students are excited about the outdoor classroom as a learning environment for both traditional classes and also for the ability to study the performing arts. ~~The school does not currently have an auditorium or theater space.~~

Establish design committee

The CSTC has charged the Education Association of East Oktibbeha County High School (EOCHS) to establish a design committee to act on behalf of the school and community throughout the design process. Five members have volunteered to serve on this committee, with one alumni member, Jacqueline Ellis, acting as the primary facilitator.

Fundraising

The Education Association of EOCHS has already begun to generate revenue from fundraisers such as ball games, bake sales, and cookouts. To date, they have collected donations of \$33,000. This amount includes a generous gift from Oakland Raider's pro-football player, Jerry Rice, who is a graduate of the school. This fundraising effort will continue until the completion of the project.

PHASE TWO:

Precedent Research

The CSTC will conduct precedent research on various outdoor classrooms, amphitheaters, and educational walking trails. The research will then be demonstrated in a powerpoint presentation to the design committee to obtain feedback on design issues.

Acquire Materials

The Education Association of EOCHS will work to acquire donated materials from local and regional manufacturers and suppliers. All other materials will be locally purchased, where possible.

Schematic Design

The CSTC will generate schematic designs, including drawings and models, to present to the design committee at meetings for review and feedback.

Design Development

After consideration of comments from the schematic design meetings, the CSTC will develop a set of working drawings of the outdoor classroom for construction.

PHASE THREE:

Construction

EOCHS alumni and community members have volunteered to provide some of the labor involved with building the outdoor classroom. Supplemental labor will be contracted to local specialists where needed. The Oktibbeha County Board of Supervisors has also offered to lend assistance to shape the land on the sloped site.

Maintenance

Once the outdoor classroom is built, the Education Association of EOCHS has volunteered to regularly maintain and upkeep the facility, enlisting students, alumni and community members to perform necessary work on a monthly basis. Jacqueline Ellis, the facilitator for the project and president of the school's Education Association, has volunteered to personally coordinate this effort.

When do these steps begin and when will they be completed?

Phase one of the project, which includes consultation on the outdoor classroom, began in January 2003. Phase two of the project, which includes architectural design, will begin in summer 2004. Phase three, which includes construction, will begin in the spring of 2005. The outdoor classroom is scheduled to be completed by December 31, 2005.

How does this request relate to The Carl Small Town Center's long-range planning, including its strategic vision and priorities?

It is the mission of The Carl Small Town Center to provide architectural design guidance, build partnerships with others to better serve community needs, and provide leadership and support to those committed to improving the public realm. The Carl Small Town Center will act as the facilitator between school and community to help achieve the EOCHS alumni group's goal of improving the quality of education at their alma mater through the creation of the outdoor classroom. It is the goal of the CSTC to implement

local communities' visions, such as EOCHS's outdoor classroom, through built applications.

How does this request relate to the Hardin Foundation goal and themes for 2004-2008?

Community-based Initiatives

Increases number of local and regional partnerships for improving student academic performance, service learning and citizen leadership

The outdoor classroom will be realized by a collaborative effort from both school and community participants. A number of partnerships have already been established with the school, including EOCHS students, alumni and teachers, the Oktibbeha County Board of Supervisors, Faculty of the MSU College of Architecture, Faculty of the MSU College of Education, local retailers, regional industries, and local community members. These partners offer educational assistance, provide monetary donations, provide material donations, organize fundraisers, solicit donations, and motivate school and community toward the shared vision of creating the outdoor classroom and improving the quality of education at EOCHS. These partners also offer a vested interest in the education of each EOCHS student. The students' interest in their own educations will be increased when they see others vested in them as well.

Leadership

Increases the number of current and future teachers, principals, and board members with the capacity to improve opportunities for all students

Not all educational needs can be met inside the classroom. The outdoor classroom and adjacent educational path will provide opportunities for teachers to broaden the scope of their pedagogical repertoire, providing another resource for them and for their students.

The educational walking path is more than a physical means to link the school and outdoor classroom. The educational walking trail will provide numerous opportunities to create varied learning stations and educational experiences along its path. Learning stations could include the exploration of ecology, trigonometry, theater, forestry, architecture, horticulture, and numerous other topics. The walking trail also has potential for expansion, allowing any member of the school or community to create a new hands-on educational station along the path.

This project increases the number of current and future teachers, principals, and board members with the capacity to improve opportunities for all students by providing a resource for the purpose of educating beyond the traditional classroom experience. The interactive outdoor classroom also inspires students to be leaders, facilitating a proactive approach to their educational careers.

Achievement Gap

To increase the number of poor, minority and handicapped students who successfully complete high school and higher education

The EOCHS student population consists primarily of minority students. They are often disadvantaged students who have been afforded a less-than-adequate education in the Oktibbeha County School System. The outdoor classroom will provide many educational opportunities for numerous EOCHS students. Handicapped students will also have ready access to this facility. Every student will use the facility, whether associated with a class or extracurricular activity, therefore increasing the amount of students whose education can be expanded and enriched. Research has shown that students who are provided supplemental educational opportunities, like those associated with the outdoor classroom, are more likely to graduate from high school and pursue higher education.

Preparation for College

To increase the number of students who leave high school adequately prepared to complete college entrance exams successfully and then to succeed in community colleges, colleges, and universities

The outdoor classroom will serve as a resource for educator and student alike, providing EOCHS students with an expanded scope of knowledge to prepare them for higher education. Understanding that not all students learn from traditional teaching methods, the outdoor classroom provides students with tangible opportunities to learn about a wide range of topics. Ultimately, the outdoor classroom will help build a solid foundation of knowledge from which to apply toward achievement in higher education.