

UT College of Architecture + Design 2015 Annual Report:

Growing in the Heart of Knoxville: Supporting the Health of Our Community



Students and faculty in the College of Architecture and Design are using their hands and design ingenuity to impact the health of many of our Knoxville neighbors. Beginning in Fall 2014, when design development was completed, until today, students in Jennifer Akerman and Bob French's studios, have been designing and building structures at Beardsley Farm, a community farm in the heart of the city.

The Community Action Committee Beardsley Community Farm is a non-profit urban farm promoting food security and sustainable agriculture through practice, education and community outreach. Each year, hundreds of volunteers help grow and harvest food, producing about 10,000 pounds of fresh produce used by citizens aided by Meals on Wheels, Second Harvest of East Tennessee and others. Additionally, the farm is visited by hundreds of guests annually, including students and people interested in learning about sustainable farming.

UT students sought to help Beardsley Farm better fulfill its mission of educating the public about sustainable farming by designing a building that will act as a welcoming interface between farm and the community it serves. Located in a public park, the existing demonstration farm is separated from the public by steep topography and security fences. The new building makes a more generous entry to the farm campus by adding a visible covered area that can be used by all and providing shelter for visitors, thus allowing more year-round visitation and educational programming.

Akerman and her students, more than 40 and counting, have invested hundreds of hours of design innovation, construction planning and actual construction time at Beardsley Farm to build the 1,200-sq-ft education center and amphitheater classroom. Part of the college's

design/build/evaluate program, this project is two years in the making and very nearly complete.

“Our students have become owners. They’re invested in the success of this project, and they are committed to seeing it through. They see the value in their work, and at the same time, they are gaining real-world experience that architecture students can only get from being able to participate in a design/build program,” said Akerman.

The education center is built from bricks generously donated by General Shale Brick. It offers a flexible classroom, administrative areas for farm staff and restrooms, as well as an outdoor classroom that will become the new front door to the farm’s campus.

“The education center is not just for student groups,” said Bailey Green, B.Arch. 2015 and research assistant. “It offers a community gathering place, which helps Beardsley more actively engage with its surrounding community.”

The students chose structural brick for its durability and sustainability. They went through weeks of masonry training before beginning to lay the bricks during Summer 2015. Additionally, they designed cisterns to catch rainwater that can be reused in the farm, and they have worked with builder, Merit Construction, to learn practices to reduce construction waste.

Reusing materials has also been an important lesson. “Bricks used in the amphitheater were reclaimed from the old radio station structure on the campus of Knoxville College,” said Bud Archer, M.Arch. 2015 and research assistant. “I think it makes the farm even more deeply tied to the community, plus reusing materials is a sustainable approach to construction.”

In addition to sustainability, the Beardsley Farm design/build project has been a lesson in collaboration. While students in architecture studios have led the project, they’ve collaborated with students in Landscape Architecture, Interior Design, Civil Engineering and Environmental Studies.

Students also have worked with General Shale Brick, Merit Construction, the City of Knoxville, the Public Building Authority and Elizabeth Eason Architects. Other generous donors include Harrison Concrete, Paulk + Co., Stonepeak Tile, Keene Building Products, Fry Reglet, Columbia Forest Products, Blum, Heely-Brown Company, Baird and Wilson Sheetmetal and the American Institute of Architects East Tennessee.

The Beardsley Farm project is expected to be completed in late spring 2016, when the community will be invited to cut the ribbon on this groundbreaking project, deeply rooted in the heart of the city.

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