

To the Kelso school architects:

A learning place should be a special place

by Douglas Gantenbein
staff writer

In his book "Civilisation," Sir Kenneth Clark wrote of architecture: "One could tell more about a civilisation from its architecture than from anything else it leaves behind. Painting and literature depend largely on unpredictable individuals. But architecture... depends upon a relationship between the user and the maker much closer than in the other arts."

Clark is right. While we may admire a beautiful painting or enjoy a good book, we don't have to live with them. We can always walk away.

But a building is different. While it may be esthetically appealing, if it doesn't serve the purposes of the dweller it fails. The world's handsomest building would be decried as a disaster if, for example, not enough restrooms were provided.

And among buildings, schools are special cases. They must serve a historically fussy group of people—kids—yet fall within the budget parameters of an even fussier group—taxpayers.

No small task. But Sandy Elementary District taxpayers nonetheless voted last winter to forge ahead with the design and construction of a school building to be put up in the Kelso area near the site of several earlier school buildings.

The architect they chose was the Portland firm of Broome, Oringdolph, O'Toole, Rudolf and Associates—a company that is well respected by its fellow architects as it is a big mouthful.

But a site and a budget aren't enough for a school architect to go on. To get

input from the people who will be using the building, project manager Heinz Rudolf gathered a group representing teachers, administration, board members and even maintenance, sat them in a room, and "locked them all inside for the day," to find out what they were looking for in the new building.

"We try to include the user groups as much as possible, not just the people on the board," explained Rudolf of the brainstorming session. "It's really the people's building."

From that session were drawn general directions for the project, qualitative and quantitative statements reflecting what will be looked for in the new building.

Designer Stanly Boles said the approach to designing a school follows four lines—function, form, economy and time.

Under the time category, for instance, it was agreed on that the building would reflect the historic past of its site, would operate during the present on a nine-month, 14-hour day basis, and for the future, be capable of taking a doubling in enrollment without losing its functional performance.

Everyone's opinion is sought during the session. "We let all the people wrestle with it right then rather than finding out something six weeks down the pike," Boles said.

Or, as Rudolf said, "We get all the cards on the table."

In preparation for the all-day think binge, the participants had earlier made tours of potentially similar schools with Rudolf, talking about architecture, the group's likes and dislikes and such things as different building materials.



CONSTRUCTIVE DISCUSSION: Architects Tom Pene (left), Heinz Rudolf (center) and Stanly Boles discuss changes of their plan for Sandy

Elementary's new Kelso School.

That way, when one of the architects says "formed concrete" everyone knows exactly what he is talking about because simply saying "concrete" is like saying "apples"—one man's Jonathan is another man's Golden Delicious.

After the planning session, a document is written up of general guidelines regarding the building's size, function and appearance.

Comments in the planning document range from the esthetic ("Take advantage of the site's unique amenities") to the specific ("Each classroom needs 1000 square feet").

The program then becomes "the baton that is passed on to the design team," where the initial plans are drawn up.

While buildings such as offices serve primarily to fill a functional need, Rudolf said that the design of a school needs to be more than just a box.

"Education can be done in any space," he said. "But by designing a good building that is in harmony with the space and the environment we can make learning so much easier for the teachers and the students."

A factor that has had a dramatic impact on architectural concepts is the need for energy efficiency.

"Years ago, it was almost 'the more energy you used, the better,'" said Rudolf. "Now it's the exact opposite."

Now even the placement of the buildings on the site is done with an eye towards exposure to sun or wind. Large volumes, such as gymnasiums, are placed between the sun and the smaller classrooms to shade the rooms.

The use of light has been re-thought also, with more emphasis on the "quality" of light rather than just the quantity.

Rudolf said that to help hold down the costs of heating and cooling a school building his designers employ what is called a "variable volume" system.

In it, large fans are hooked to thermostats throughout the building. If one room gets too cool or too warm, air can be pumped in our out of it to change the temperature. The system makes much greater use of warmth from people and room lights than more traditional methods of simply turning the heat up.

But above all the considerations of space, energy and the like, Rudolf said

there is one factor that holds sway over all others. Cost is "the overriding factor."

Once the sketches are approved and bids are left, the architect doesn't just fade into the background. Rudolf said that at his firm weekly checks are made with the contractor to insure that all the work is being carried out to the specifications set forth in the incredibly detailed blueprints.

Rudolf said that the days of the "renaissance" architect, the architectural equivalent of a utility infielder, have gone by. Now the work is done by a team of specialists—each with his own special task.

As project manager, Rudolf becomes the conductor of this architectural symphony, coordinating all the different sections so they make the same kind of music.

"We are here for one purpose," he explains. "To create a building, to do the best, to stay within the budget and to design the building exactly as it is intended."

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Means killed in car wreck

A 75-year-old Sandy man was killed only a few blocks from his home in a single-car accident on Friday evening.

Elmer William Means was pronounced dead on arrival at Gresham Community Hospital after he was thrown

from the car his wife, Esther Elizabeth Means, was driving. Clackamas County Sheriff's deputies reports said the vehicle went out of control off Kleinsmith Road in the Sandy area.

Means was thrown out the

passenger door which opened as the car struck a utility pole, swung around and came to rest against the pole's guy wire.

Alpine Ambulance and the Sandy Fire Department also answered the call.

Safety class slated

A motorcycle rider safety course will be held April 22, 23, 29 and 30 from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Clackamas Community College.

The course lasts from 22 to 24 hours and includes classroom and on-cycle skill riding. The course is open to

anyone 16 years or older with an Oregon drivers license. Because of limited enrollment, those wishing to participate should call now, 658-3485.

Motorcycles will be loaned by Portland Honda and Gresham Kawasaki.

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