

Silver Medal Winner

Gary Comer Youth Center & College Prep

Chicago, Illinois

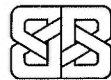


Jasmine Shah

This is an excerpt from:

Partnering Strategies for the Urban Edge

2011 RUDY BRUNER AWARD FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE



BRUNER FOUNDATION, INC.

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Steve Hall

Project At-A-Glance

WHAT IS GARY COMER YOUTH CENTER AND COLLEGE PREP?

- A 13.5-acre campus in the Grand Crossing neighborhood of Chicago, composed of the 80,000 square foot (sf) Gary Comer Youth Center and the 45,000 sf Gary Comer College Prep.
- An education-focused complex that provides academic, recreational, athletic, job training and other programs for under-served students on Chicago's South Side.
- A project that originated from the philanthropic efforts of Gary Comer (founder of Lands' End), who founded the Comer Science and Education Foundation to foster his work with the Revere Elementary School community where he grew up.

PROJECT GOALS

- To offer positive extracurricular alternatives in a welcoming and safe environment, with the goal of providing support for all students to graduate from high school prepared to pursue college or careers.
- To provide college preparatory education for families living in poverty with few educational options.
- To develop the discipline necessary for their students to succeed in their future professions.
- To teach students to honor their community.
- To provide a wide range of programming, events and social support for the community.

Project Chronology

1999 Gary Comer visits Paul Revere Elementary School, which he attended as a child. After talking with Principal Shelby Taylor, he decided to partner with the school to provide up-to-date computers for student use. In June Comer Science and Education Foundation (CSEF) is incorporated.

2002 Gary Comer hosts a series of breakfasts to find out more about community needs; Sam Binion conducts door-to-door outreach asking similar questions. Greg Mooney meets Gary Comer through the breakfasts.

2002 Greg Mooney is hired in 2002 as Executive Director of CSEF, and works closely with Shelby Taylor on initiatives at Revere School and in the wider community.

2002 Gary Comer begins to talk with Arthur Robertson about ways to support the award-winning South Shore Drill Team (SSDT) and its youth development activities.

2003 Gary Comer meets John Ronan, and hires him to work on upgrades to the Revere School building. They later begin to discuss creating a home for SSDT, and the program quickly expands to a community center for youth.

2004 Sam Binion is selected by community residents to act as a liaison for CSEF's ongoing efforts in community engagement and development.

December: Groundbreaking for the Gary Comer Youth Center (GCYC).

2005-06 CSEF begins a program to develop new housing on vacant lots in the neighborhood.

2006 *May:* GCYC is dedicated.

June: GCYC opens for community programs.

October: Gary Comer dies at 78 of bone-marrow cancer.

2008 *February:* The Chicago City Council approves purchase of land (from CSEF) for a public library branch in Grand Crossing. (The 5th Ward (out of 50 in Chicago) is the only one without its own library.)

September: Gary Comer College Prep (GCCP) holds classes for its first freshman class in space at GCYC.

2008 Revere C.A.R.E., born from CSEF's community outreach efforts, becomes an independent community organization comprised of 10 block clubs in the area.

2009 Early in the year, design begins on a new building for GCCP. The design is initially constrained by an existing landholder who operates bar on his site; he is eventually persuaded to sell his land to CSEF. Construction begins later that year.

2010 February: Construction begins on the Grand Crossing Branch Library.

August: GCCP building is completed; classes begin at the new building in September.

KEY PARTICIPANTS INTERVIEWED

Core Project Team Members

GREG MOONEY *Executive Director, Comer Science and Education Foundation and Gary Comer Youth Center*

JAMES TROUPIS *Principal, Gary Comer College Prep*

JOHN RONAN *Project Architect; Principal, John Ronan Architects*



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CSEF/GCYC Board and Staff

GUY COMER *President, CSEF*

BILL SCHLEICHER *President, GCI (Gary Comer, Inc.)*

AYOKA SAMUELS *GCYC Senior Program Director*

EMILY CONRATH *CSEF and GCYC Development Manager*

KATIE ESTES *GCYC Art Instructor*

DOT BENFORD *GCYC Program Support Coordinator*

MARJORIE HESS *GCYC Garden Manager*

GCCP Staff and Students

MIKE HUGUELET *Dean of College & Citizenship*

ADE FATOKE *Dean of Operations*

CHRIS CARLSON *Science Teacher*

PATRICE ARNWINE *Student, 10th Grade*

BENNIE DANIEL *Student, 11th Grade*

JOSHUA JACKSON *Student, 11th Grade*

LAURA JONES *Student, 10th Grade*

VINNETTA SIMA *Student, 11th Grade*

City of Chicago

CHRISTINE RAGUSO *Deputy Chief of Staff for Mayor Daley*

LISA HOPE WASHINGTON *Project Manager, Department of Housing
and Economic Development*

LESLIE HAIRSTON *5th Ward Alderman*

Program Partners

LINDA SHAPIRO *Vice President of External Affairs and Strategy,
ACCESS Community Health Network*

ARTHUR ROBERTSON *Founder and Executive Director,
South Shore Drill Team*

JEFF McCARTER *Executive Director, Free Spirit Media*

Community Members

SHELBY TAYLOR *Former Principal, Paul Revere Elementary School*

SAM BINION *Program Director, Revere C.A.R.E.*

ANTHONY WRIGHT *Pastor, Just Christ Ministries; President,
Revere C.A.R.E.*

DORIS LEACH *President, South Oakwood-Brookhaven
Neighbors Organization*

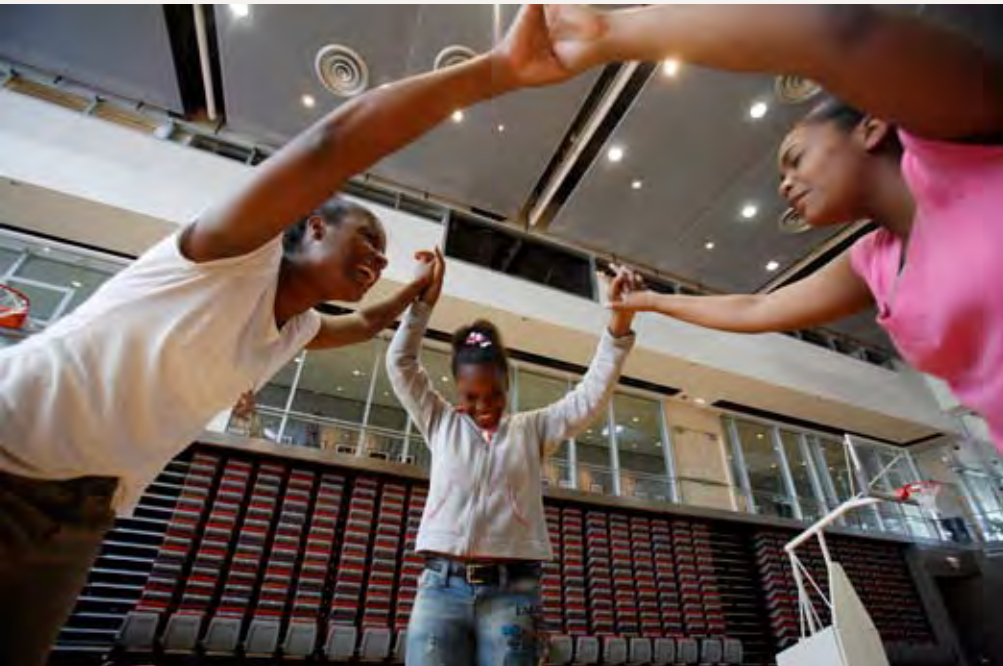
CONSTANCE BENSON *Member, South Oakwood-Brookhaven
Neighbors Organization*

ADRIENNE HILL *Member, South Oakwood-Brookhaven
Neighbors Organization*

LENORE JACKSON *Member, South Oakwood-Brookhaven
Neighbors Organization*

FRANCES POWER *Member, South Oakwood-Brookhaven
Neighbors Organization*

Project Description



Summer Classes

PROJECT HISTORY AND PROCESS

At first glance, it is tempting to cast the story of the Gary Comer Youth Center and Gary Comer College Prep as the heroic endeavor of one man to turn around a failing school and its surrounding neighborhood. To do so not only obscures the crucial contributions of many dedicated participants in the project's development; it also belies the spirit in which Gary Comer approached his efforts in Grand Crossing. A more accurate telling of the story reframes Comer's role as that of a catalyst, helping a broad range of people and groups to connect their interests and efforts with one another through these two buildings.

Lands' End Founder Looks to Give Back

Comer began adding his spark to the process in 1998, when he returned to visit the Revere Elementary School from which he graduated in 1942. Disturbed by the condition of the school's educational facilities and materials, Comer approached then-Principal Shelby Taylor with an offer to help. Taylor was in his first year as principal, the third principal of the school in less than two years. Seeking to transform the educational outcomes in the school, Taylor accepted Comer's offer and the two worked together to implement \$68,000 of initial investment, including new computers, building renovations, teacher training and health services. The result was an unprecedented gain in test scores.

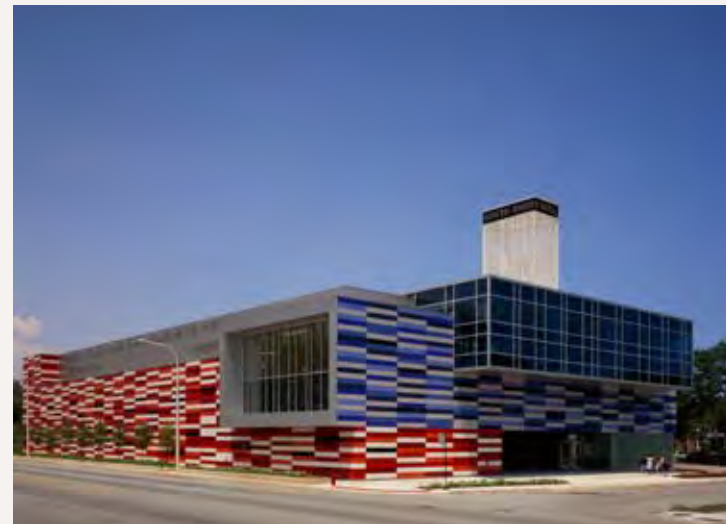
As Comer continued working with the Revere School, he began to broaden his vision for the impact of his investment. After creating the Comer Science and Education Foundation to manage his community efforts, he also pursued a wider community development model that sought to address the wide range of factors affecting student performance, from direct educational support to housing and family health to opportunities for positive social activities. Comer began holding monthly breakfasts in 2000 to meet community members and identify community needs. Through these breakfasts, he would connect with local leaders such as Alderman Leslie Hairston and Sam Binion, both of whom became critical to CSEF's outreach efforts. He also met educator Greg Mooney, whom he later hired to become CSEF's Executive Director.

A Home for the South Shore Drill Team

Comer's ongoing work with the Revere School kept him in contact with the school's Dean and Disciplinarian, Arthur Robertson. Robertson had founded the South Shore Drill Team in 1980 to provide an afterschool activity with discipline, mentoring and educational support for local youth; in 20 years, the team grew to over 300 members, won national championships and had been featured in movies, and demonstrated a near-perfect high school graduation rate among its participants. In a testament to Robertson's commitment and leadership, SSDT had achieved these successes without a permanent practice space; practices for its component teams (divided by age, skill level and skill type) were held in a variety

of borrowed spaces around the community, and the team had no space where it could gather as a whole.

Comer recognized the tremendous positive influence of SSDT on community youth, and began to talk with Robertson about finding a practice facility. Although Robertson at first envisioned little more than an empty warehouse, Comer encouraged him to think more broadly. Eventually, the concept evolved into a community youth center, with SSDT at its heart. Around this same time, Comer met architect John Ronan, and hired him to do some of the building upgrades at the Revere School. As Comer began to develop his plans for the youth center, he engaged Ronan to give the concept form.



Steve Hall

Gary Comer Youth Center



While the core needs of SSDT were clear, the rest of the youth center program was continually in flux; in interviews, Ronan described the program as changing from week to week. While community residents proposed a variety of programs for youth and adults, Comer was insistent that the project focus on the needs of youth rather than becoming a general community center. Other CSEF initiatives, such as purchasing vacant lots in order to develop affordable housing, addressed wider community needs, but were still based on an interest in providing a holistically healthy environment for neighborhood youth. As part of these broad community development efforts, Binion's community relations work included not only eliciting neighborhood ideas for the programs and design of the youth center, but also building community leadership capacity by organizing and supporting block clubs and other neighborhood action groups.

Midway through the project, an unexpected event shifted planning and construction into high gear: the recurrence of Gary Comer's bone-marrow cancer. Comer pressed to complete the youth center quickly, and he participated in its dedication months before his death in 2006.

Comer was insistent that the project focus on the needs of youth and provide a holistically healthy environment for the neighborhood.

Expanding Educational Opportunity

The Gary Comer Youth Center opened with a core set of programs, including the Drill Team, arts and dance, sound and video production, and urban gardening. The Center's programs continued evolving, and health services were slowly added. But as CSEF observed the outcomes for the students it served at Revere School, it noticed that proffered college scholarships for Revere School alumni were not being used. The reason: students the foundation invested in during elementary and middle school were being lost in Chicago public high schools, and many were not graduating.

This observation led CSEF to establish a partnership with the Noble Street Charter Schools, a network with a strong reputation that had opened a number of schools on the West Side. CSEF invited Noble to start a high school in Grand Crossing. At the same time, James Troupis was working with Noble to pursue a charter start-up, and became principal of the new Gary Comer College Prep (GCCP).

GCCP started its first class of 155 freshmen in 2008, in two seminar rooms at GCYC that were converted to classrooms during the school day. In the early months of 2009, CSEF and Troupis began to plan a new high school building, once again turning to John Ronan. The design and construction process was completed in 18 months, and the new building hosted its first classes in fall 2010.

URBAN CONTEXT

The Greater Grand Crossing community area is located on Chicago's South Side, approximately 9 miles from the downtown area. The area is crisscrossed by transportation infrastructure including commuter rail and elevated train lines and highways I-90 and I-94. The Grand Crossing neighborhood within the wider community area (also known as the South Oakwood-Brookhaven neighborhood) is a triangle located in the NE corner of Greater Grand Crossing. It is bounded by the Oakwood Cemetery to the north, the Metra Electric District rail line to the east, and the Chicago Skyway/I-90 to the west.

The area is in the SE corner of Chicago's 5th Ward, a ward which includes the University of Chicago and Jackson Park in the north, but also a series of less affluent neighborhoods in the south. As one heads through the 5th Ward west on 71st Street toward Grand Crossing, the neighborhood shows both signs of urban decay and a few flourishing businesses along the main commercial corridors. Grand Crossing is primarily a residential area, except for a small business district at the intersection of South Chicago Avenue, Cottage Grove Avenue and 71st Street. Many homes show signs of disrepair or abandonment, but much of the housing stock is of good base quality. Although a large number of vacant lots created holes in the residential fabric over the past few decades, recent residential development by CSEF has filled in many of these spaces with new construction and new residents.



The site of GCYC and GCCP runs in a narrow band south from 71st Street along South Chicago Avenue. South Chicago is a wide traffic artery that carries approximately 40,000 cars per day. Crosswalks are infrequent, tree cover along sidewalks is limited, and there are large numbers of blank walls or empty lots as one travels south, creating an unfriendly pedestrian environment. Directly across South Chicago from the GCYC/GCCP site, a row of homes and a church help this section of the street feel relatively pleasant and populated. Recently the City added a crosswalk to the intersection.

The neighborhood of housing on the eastern side of the site is a dense network of lots with 20' wide frontage and about 120' of depth from sidewalk to alley. A row of garages along an alley is directly adjacent to GCYC; a neighborhood street with backyards runs alongside GCCP. The entire site is fenced off from the surrounding neighborhood; access to the buildings and site is only available through the main lobbies of each building, or a gated entrance to the parking lot between them. All three entrances are monitored by security staff (via intercom in the case of the parking lot).

DEMOGRAPHICS

The Grand Crossing neighborhood has approximately 2,000 residents, approximately 350 of whom are school age children and youth. The area is more than 95% African-American with a me-



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dian household income of \$34,000 for 3 people. Two-thirds of families in the area with children have incomes below the poverty level. Statistics are similar throughout the Greater Grand Crossing community area.

Students who participate in programs at GCYC or attend school at GCCP come from across the South Side, not just the Grand Crossing neighborhood. GCCP serves approximately 30% of the high school students in the Revere School catchment area (which is contiguous with the Grand Crossing neighborhood boundaries). Before GCCP opened, students from the neighborhood attended over 50 different high schools across Chicago. The graduation rate for Chicago Public high school students is less than 50%.



All photos: Steve Hall



MAJOR FACILITIES AND SPACES

Gary Comer Youth Center

The Gary Comer Youth Center opened in 2006 and serves community residents by providing a safe alternative for youth in the evenings, weekends and summer with a wide range of programming in arts, health and fitness, and academics. It provides support space for the high school classes and classroom space for the middle school students during school hours and is also home to a number of clubs and community organizations including the 300-member award-winning South Shore Drill Team. GCYC serves 1,000 members annually in its programs, and provides three meals daily to students (breakfast and lunch for GCCP students and dinner for GCYC users). The parking lot between GCYC and GCCP serves as a parade ground for SSDT.

Clockwise from top left: Gary Comer Youth Center, Roof Garden, Gary Comer College Prep

Gary Comer College Prep

Gary Comer College Prep, a campus of the Noble Network of Charter Schools, opened in its new building in 2010 after two years of operation in GCYC. GCCP provides a rigorous college preparatory education for approximately 685 high school and 6th grade students from across the South Side. The school expects a full population of 800 6th-12th grade students beginning in the 2013-2014 school year. Comprised mostly of classrooms, the school creates a campus with the youth center, which provides support space for co-curricular classes and other activities (gym, cafeteria, computer lab, art and music rooms, and assembly space). The middle school students attend classes within GCYC.

Urban Farm and Gardens

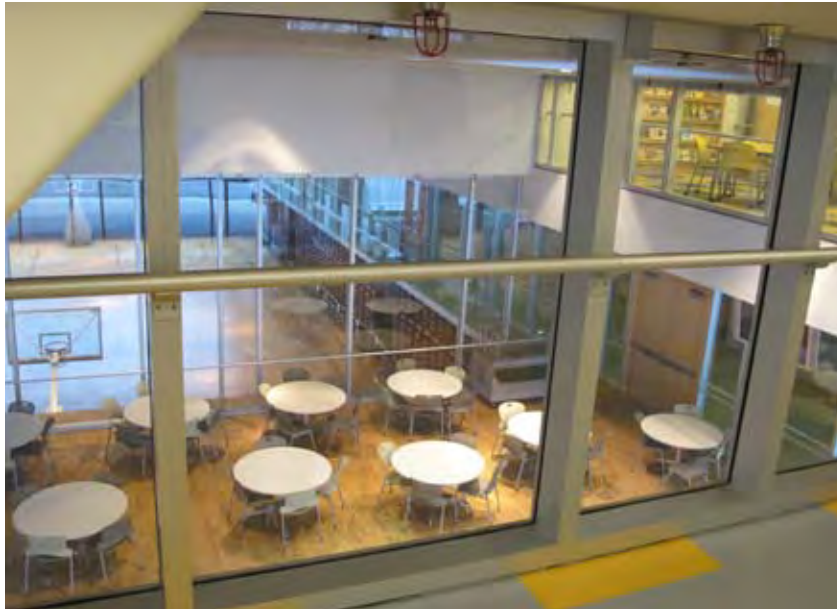
The GCYC/GCCP complex includes three garden spaces: the rooftop garden of GCYC, an outdoor classroom and rain garden next to the parking lot, and an urban youth education garden that was established on a vacant lot across the street. Students use the spaces for science education during the school day, but they are primarily active afterschool during GCYC's urban agriculture programs. In the roof garden and urban garden, students grow produce for sale, for use in the GCYC cafeteria, and for browsing by GCYC users (an example given was seniors who may pick flowers or edibles after yoga class). The rain garden is used as a teaching tool, and also contains a large grill that is used for events.

DESIGN

Architectural Design – GCYC

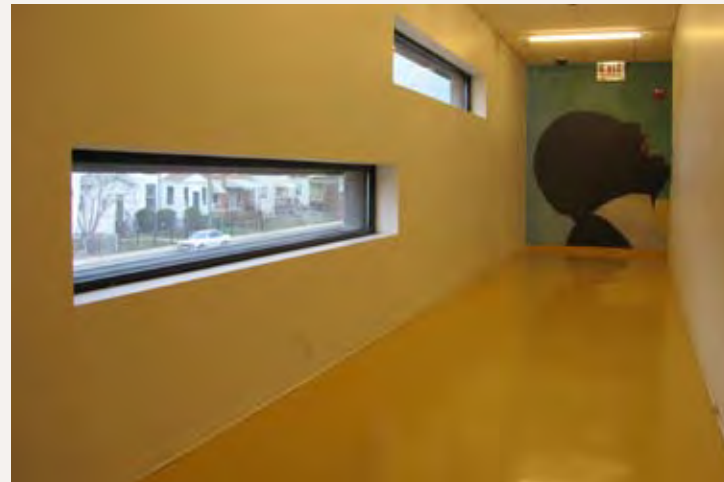
Ronan turned the uncertainty in GCYC's design development process into an asset by creating a series of flexible spaces around the central theater and gymnasium that serves as practice space for SSDT. He describes the design as a series of programmatic bars wrapped around this core; the bars terminate in showcase spaces with extensive glazing that highlight special programs: the art room, the dance studio, and the exhibition rooms. Mayor Richard Daley's green roofs initiative required that the building include this feature; Gary Comer's addition of a third floor to the program during the design phase helped to make this an easily accessible space that could also be used for programming. Two spaces had to be designed for their particular purpose because of special equipment requirements: the audio recording studio and the video production room, which is linked to the theater space for live recording of events.

Security was an important concern within and around the building. The focus was on both discipline inside and potential gun violence outside. In order to avoid the fortress implied by such a program, Ronan developed an elaborate screen of red, blue and white panels (the colors derived from SSDT uniforms) with discreet penetrations for light. In addition, bullet proof glass was used up to eight feet where more light was required. The result is a surprisingly well-lit facility with good views from the inside to the neighborhood and well-protected direct views to the interior.



The glazing in the interior facilitated good sight lines among spaces, thus heightening internal security; this comes with the additional advantage of allowing a visual layering of activities as one looks across multiple spaces. The result is a wonderful sense of liveliness, as views to the roof gardens, the gymnasium or the dining hall animate rooms throughout the building.

A white tower projects from the southwest corner of the roof, encircled at the top by a scrolling LED display. Several interviewees and written sources noted the role this tower plays as a landmark for a neighborhood that has often lacked a clear sense of identity. The LED screen highlights GCYC as the home of the South Shore Drill Team and can also be used for major event announcements.



Architectural Design – GCCP

The two floors of GCCP have a very simple parti: classrooms on the outside, service and administrative spaces on the inside. The concept is designed to illustrate the clear priority of teaching and learning within the building. GCCP's main entrance is a two story atrium facing the youth center across the parking lot. The space is bright and welcoming, and the walls are lined with large inspirational quotes and graphics, college crests, and the school logo. The main stairs at the building's entrance are of humble materials, but they still give some of the sense of a grand staircase. The rear staircase at the opposite corner of the core is more of a service stair. The offices and staff service spaces that are tucked into the core feel cramped and cheerless, but administrators appear to fully embrace the idea that their offices should receive less attention.

Classroom features are custom-designed for particular rooms; English classrooms include built-in shelves created using the building's exterior structural supports, and chemistry and physics teachers specified the design of their classrooms to match their teaching activities. Students and teachers enjoyed the transparency of the spaces they occupied in GCYC during the first two years, and this feature was carried into the new building. Almost all classrooms have walls of windows along the hallway, and both teachers and students are on display. Both groups appreciate the accountability that comes from such high visibility, and students are not noticeably distracted by people walking in the hallways.



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Gary Comer College Prep

One of the highlighted classrooms is a large college-style lecture hall; faculty members consider this room part of students' preparation for the college environment. The campus arrangement of co-curriculars held in the GCYC building is also considered part of college prep, as students get used to walking between buildings for classes. The space sharing with GCCP building and cemented the partnership between the two facilities.

The building is screened on the three sides facing the neighborhood by a perforated metal grille. The grille makes it difficult to locate or see into windows from outside the building, but the perforations

provide enough light and visibility from within the building to keep classrooms from feeling dark. Ronan's security treatments on the facade and windows are creative and allow a good sense of connection to the outside while maintaining a secure interior environment. The building is certified LEED Silver, and key green features include daylighting, energy efficient lighting, and local building materials. The architect indicated that the concrete, aggregate and gypsum board were among the local materials used. To enhance the economic development effects of the project, contractors were required to use a certain percentage of local labor as a skills-training strategy for the neighborhood. (Although GCYC is not LEED certified, similar strategies were also used in the design and construction of that building.)



Landscape Design – Gardens and Parking Lots

The landscape of the rooftop garden is quite simple: rows of crops alternating with pavers for circulation. Plantings include both flowers



and edibles. Protective tents enable the growing of some crops (like lettuce and other greens) in the cooler months. Signs on the windows along a 3rd floor hallway provide a moment of garden history, showing the plants that were in each row during the garden's first year of operation.

The rain garden is adjacent to the GCYC building and includes two areas encircled by a stone bench to create outdoor teaching areas. The bioswale along the edge of the parking lot in this area illustrates storm water management and rainwater harvesting for students. A large industrial outdoor grill also sits in the garden area and is used by culinary program students during events.

The main parking lot between the two buildings is asphalt; because it is used as a parade ground for SSDT, the team's formation lines are marked on the pavement (in blue) along with the usual parking space lines (in white). At the edge of the parking lot near GCCP is an area named the quad; it provides a place for students to gather before and after school, and it is furnished with planters that offer seating space as well as bike racks for students. A secondary parking lot for GCCP at the intersection of 71st Street and South Chicago Avenue has permeable pavers as part of the building's green design strategies. A fence made of the same material used on GCCP's façade encircles the entire complex, except at the public building entrance on S. Ingleside Avenue for GCYC.



Steve Hall

PROGRAMS, ACTIVITIES AND PATTERNS OF USE

With the opening of GCCP in 2008, the campus has established an interesting ebb and flow of activities between the two buildings. Most students start the day at the GCYC cafeteria for breakfast; they then proceed to GCCP for the start of the school day, joining a stream of students being dropped off at the school entrance on South Chicago. For the next several hours, streams of students move back and forth between the buildings on their way between classes. In inclement weather, students are given green and white umbrellas (the school colors are green, grey and white) to stay dry, and more than one staff person described the “parade of umbrellas” as a highlight of those days.



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As the school day draws to a close, GCYC undergoes a rapid change from classroom use to afterschool use. The cafeteria offers students a healthy afterschool snack, and they proceed to their various program spaces throughout the building. The drill team also begins to practice in the gymnasium, and you can watch flags and rifles flying in the air from multiple vantage points in various rooms and hallways.

Program offerings in the youth center are diverse, including gardening and farming, cooking and nutrition, art, sound production, live and recorded video production, digital media training and other computer access, dance classes, basketball court use, game room use, and the South Shore Drill Team. Through GCYC's programs, students are prepared with workforce skills, both behavioral (discipline, timeliness, proper dress, professional conduct) and technical (culinary, urban agriculture, A/V production, etc.). The embedded health center provides a valuable aspect of community support, helping youth and their families to address physical and behavioral health issues that can compromise academic achievement and



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career success; while such services are available in other areas of the 5th Ward such as the University of Chicago, the GCYC center is much more convenient.

Activity continues into the evening, as GCYC also hosts community meetings, theater performances, and other community events, although we did not witness any such events during the time of our site visit. Some community members expressed concern that the interaction of security with visitors needed to be improved. GCYC security staff were not always aware of public meetings or events taking place in the buildings, and occasionally hindered legitimate visitors.

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

Until his death in 2006, the strategic direction of CSEF was directed primarily by Gary Comer as President, with advising and involvement from Bill Schleicher, President of GCI (Gary Comer Investments). As Gary Comer became increasingly ill, his son, Guy Comer, began to attend meetings and discussions with him, and took over as President of CSEF after his father passed away. Guy Comer and Bill Schleicher continue to partner in the strategic and investment management and decision-making for CSEF.

In CSEF's daily operations, CSEF and GCYC Executive Director Greg Mooney leads a staff team that is primarily focused on GCYC pro-

grams and operations, assisted by GCYC Senior Program Manager Ayoka Samuels. GCYC program staff develop and manage programs in areas including arts, dance, and urban gardening; however, some specialized programs like the video production studio or the community health clinic, are run through contracts between GCYC and its nonprofit program partners. Additionally, administrative staff in areas including information technology and development split their time between CSEF and GCYC business.

GCCP faculty and staff are led by Principal James Troupis, who in his first years was the youngest principal in the Chicago Public School system and the Noble Network. Troupis is assisted by a series of deans responsible for key administrative areas, including Deans of Operations, College & Citizenship, Discipline, and Students. Most teaching faculty focus on a specific subject and grade level. The school also employs special education, social work and other professionals who can provide students with additional support.

Conversations with staff at CSEF/GCYC and GCCP revealed a strong shared understanding of the mission, values and goals that underpin work in their organizations. Staff discussed their dedication to working with youth, their belief in high standards and high achievement and ability among the students served, and a commitment to improving the Grand Crossing neighborhood, demonstrated in a number of cases by their decision to move to or stay in the community. Staff members also noted the care and thoroughness with which the hiring process is conducted: early hires at GCYC described exchanges



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that were conducted over months to find the right fit, and Troupis highlighted the selectivity of GCCP hires, with a pool of 1500 applicants from around the country for just 20 open positions.

FINANCES

The overall financing of the Gary Comer Youth Center and College Prep reflects support from the Comer Science and Education Foundation, (\$3 million in FY 2011), direct funding from conventional Chicago Public Schools, state and federal sources, fees and fundraising. Each portion of operating and capital funding involved a dialogue among the funders, and internal dialogue within each funding organization. The narrative on such funding seems

straightforward as we report on the results of these discussions, but the process itself was far from simple. Interpersonal dynamics and professional assessments tied to each source and deal were carefully negotiated in a context of a long history of community, institutional and interpersonal conflicts. The success of the Gary Comer projects is grounded in the deliberate process of negotiation and continuing collaboration among project supporters.

Operating Costs

GCYC has a budget of approximately \$4.5 million. Its income sources include \$3 million from CSEF, \$1.5 million in individual contributions and grants from a variety of sources.

Gary Comer College Prep also has an annual budget of approximately \$4.5 million. The vast majority of their budget comes from Chicago Public Schools, as well as state and federal education funds. However, the school does bring in \$360,000 in fundraising and another \$250,000 in fees.

Capital Program

The \$35 million total development cost (\$30 million for construction, \$375/sf) for the Gary Comer Youth Center was funded entirely by CSEF. The \$21.5 million total development cost for Gary Comer College Prep (\$15 million for construction, 333/sf) was funded through a combination of leveraged loans and New Market Tax Credits.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY

Partnership between GCYC and GCCP

GCYC and GCCP together illustrate a holistic youth empowerment model, providing students with an environment of caring, discipline and opportunities for growth and leadership. Both organizations are committed to providing students with the skills, tools and support to successfully complete high school; GCCP adds the further commitment to college enrollment and success. GCYC supports college preparedness, but adds a critical component of career preparation in a variety of fields, for young people to explore other options in addition to college education. The range of programs available at GCYC is remarkable; the South Shore Drill team, urban agriculture, and media production (audio and video) programs deserve particular mention. The partnership with GCCP keeps GCYC's spaces occupied during school hours, when they would otherwise be vacant.

Community Engagement

During the planning for GCYC, community participation started through monthly breakfasts that Gary Comer would host, and continued through the development and strengthening of block clubs and other neighborhood groups. The breakfasts and block clubs provided vehicles through which CSEF could learn about community needs and assets and respond through the building and programs. Community members were suspicious of Comer's intentions at the outset, but it appears that these structures built



trust and credibility over time. CSEF also worked in partnership with recognized community leaders such as Alderman Hairston, Shelby Taylor, and Sam Binion.

Since the completion of GCYC, CSEF has maintained relationships with and support for community groups and leaders, but the involvement is less direct. Interviews indicated that both community members and GCYC staff would like improved communication and engagement, but the best methods are still being worked out. CSEF/GCYC and GCCP staff members contribute to community events such as Back-to-School Day, and there remain a variety of educational support partnerships among CSEF, GCCP, the Revere School and the South Oakwood-Brookhaven Neighbors via scholarship programs or tutoring.

Partnership with the City of Chicago

Representatives from the Mayor’s Office and the Department of Housing and Economic Development noted Mayor Daley’s enthusiasm for the project and its impact on the neighborhood. They stated that the Mayor’s enthusiasm led him to assign the project a dedicated staff member who would assist CSEF with the bureaucratic hurdles of the City’s planned development process. Other interviewees felt that the City’s assistance was not as effective in expediting the development process as they would have desired, but they also acknowledged the Mayor’s support.

Within the 5th Ward, Alderman Hairston has been a consistent partner and advocate since the early days of CSEF’s involvement in Grand Crossing. Alderman was instrumental in community outreach efforts, helping connect the community’s vision for transformation with the foundation’s resources. She was also able to capitalize on CSEF’s neighborhood investments in a successful campaign to create a new branch library on South Chicago a short distance from GCYC; this was a culmination of 12 years of work to bring a library branch to the only ward in the city without one.

The idealism of partnership between the Chicago Public Schools and CSEF met some difficulty in their relationship with the Revere Elementary School. CSEF hit some rough spots tied to conflicts about how schools measure success, briefly suspended their alliance with Revere, but returned to a new collaborative arrangement based upon bringing high school students to Revere to tutor the elementary

There was a successful campaign to create a new library a short distance from GCYC; this was a culmination of 12 years of work to bring a library branch to the only ward in the city without one.

school students. This kind of tension tested assumptions about how to measure success and how best to reward such success. The overall result has been a stronger alliance.



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FUTURE PLANNING AND SUSTAINABILITY

Future Planning

Both GCYC and GCCP staff noted that the projects are still in early phases and indicated that the true results for the community's youth and for the neighborhood's development would not be known for many years yet. GCYC is still establishing its full mix of programs and GCCP has yet to graduate its first class of seniors. Nonetheless, both organizations are looking to build on existing successes and expand their scope of work. The level of engagement with the Revere School has varied over the years as different models of partnership and programs continue to be tested.

GCYC's physical expansion plans focus on the urban farm; the center is working with the City to expand the farm into an adjacent vacant lot. Programmatically, GCYC is exploring both additions, such as an increase in programs for adults, and modifications, including a shift in the health center's focus from a medical treatment approach to a holistic wellness model.

GCCP began serving middle school students in the current school year, demonstrating an innovation for the Nobel Network that seldom expands downward into the lower grades. A move like this is an acknowledgement that success in the upper grades is dependent on the foundational work that precedes it.

Financial Sustainability

CSEF and GCYC are currently supported in part by a charitable trust created after Gary Comer's death; this endowment provides a significant portion of the operating budgets of both organizations, but does not cover the whole. The endowment will only continue for the next 16 years; CSEF leaders consider it a "long runway" which will allow them time to plan for a self-supporting future. The foundation is seeking a Development Director to build the organization's resources over the next several years. GCCP's local, state and federal education funding appears stable and sufficient to meet its needs for the future.

Leadership Sustainability

The leadership of CSEF, GCYC and GCCP is largely composed of young and enthusiastic staffers with a high level of commitment. Although the site visit team expressed some concerns about the potential for burnout, staff members appear interested in long-term roles with their organizations, and the leadership team is highly invested and stable. A larger challenge for the organizations is their leadership role within the community, especially for CSEF. The foundation invested in a wide range of community development efforts, but would like to re-focus on its core interest in youth and education. CSEF hopes to attract additional institutional partners who will also build relationships with local leaders and make substantial and consistent investments in the community. As far as GCYC and GCCP, CSEF will remain heavily involved with both

programs and facilities. GCYC is the foundation's home facility, and most of CSEF's staff is devoted full or part time to programs and operations. CSEF will also continue working with GCCP on education initiatives, including the expansion of the school to lower grades.

CSEF and GCYC also continue to work with local community groups to increase their capacity for community action. Revere C.A.R.E. (A Community Actively Reaching Each Other), a coalition of neighborhood block clubs, grew out of CSEF's organizing efforts, and Program Director Sam Binion manages the organization's activities around public safety, education and economic opportunities. Other long-time organizations, such as South Oakwood-Brookhaven Neighbors, also provide neighborhood clean-up, scholarship and capacity-building programs. Some interviewees noted the expanded access that CSEF can provide to resources and attention beyond the neighborhood as one of the strengths of the foundation's ongoing involvement.

Operational Sustainability

GCYC and GCCP set aside funds for ongoing maintenance of buildings and equipment; this is a substantial part of GCYC's operating budget (see Finances above). The site visit committee felt some concern about the sustainability of maintaining GCYC's technology and mechanical systems and keeping them up to date, including the A/V production rooms and embedded projection systems in the exhibition rooms. (In another example, the theater seating system



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could not be demonstrated for the team because it was waiting for maintenance). GCYC staff indicated that they work to keep the systems in good condition so that they will serve the organization well for many years; some of the production equipment is also maintained by program partners.

PROJECT IMPACTS

Impacts on Youth

By all accounts – including those of GCCP/GCYC students – the impact of the center and the school on youth opportunities has been exceptional. Students commented on and embraced the value of the discipline they learn at GCCP, the new skills they are exposed to at GCYC, and the adult caring and mentoring they receive through both organizations. Members of the South Oakwood-Brookhaven Neighbors related stories of the positive effects of GCYC programs and GCCP education on their children and grandchildren. GCYC staff noted the professional interactions that urban agriculture program participants have with local chefs, who regard them as equals when discussing micro-greens. Across the board, interviewees high-

lighted the new opportunities and higher expectations that are now available to participating youth.

Some interviewees also indicated that involvement with the center and the school is not successful for everyone. Some students leave GCCP because they are not comfortable with the discipline and rigor of the program. Other youth in the neighborhood are not ready even for the less restrictive environment of GCYC. Revere C.A.R.E.'s Ring of Hope boxing program is an example of community efforts to engage harder to reach youth and young adults in the neighborhood.

Impacts on Community Perceptions

Interviewees were also consistently appreciative of the changed perceptions inside and outside Grand Crossing as a result of the project. Neighbors enjoyed the beauty of the projects (although some didn't love the colors), and were glad to have facilities that helped draw positive attention to the community and its residents. The GCYC/GCCP complex is considered a strong aesthetic contribution to the neighborhood, offering both a beautiful facility and a way of putting Grand Crossing "on the map" within Chicago. Many people commented on a renewed sense of pride and hope in the neighborhood.

Although specific crime statistics were difficult to come by, interviewees across the board reported improved perceptions of neighborhood safety and quality of life and noted that even an improved perception is an important change for local residents. Anecdotally, interviewees described a lower incidence of audible gunfire, and a shift in violent crime involvement from youth age 14-17 to older youth (18-21). Several reported that residents are more willing to be out on the streets and in public spaces, and neighbors engage in safety walks to provide eyes on the street. CSEF's wider community development programs, including community organization support and housing, have also contributed to neighborhood improvements.

Assessing Project Success

SUCCESS IN MEETING PROJECT GOALS

- *To offer positive extracurricular alternatives in a welcoming and safe environment, with the goal of providing support for all students to graduate from high school prepared to pursue college or careers.*

GCYC and GCCP together illustrate a holistic youth empowerment model, providing students with an environment of caring, discipline

and opportunities for growth and leadership. The physical environment of the buildings provides safety from negative elements in the neighborhood and a high level of observation within, but is not oppressive. Both GCYC and GCCP have strong, solid masses and clear security features, yet the buildings feel bright and welcoming from the outside, and the façades seem light rather than heavy.

- *To provide college preparatory education for families living in poverty with few educational options.*

GCCP's program is rigorously directed toward college enrollment and graduation, including mandatory visits to local campuses and opportunities for overnight stays at schools around the country. They maintain strong discipline and goal orientation, and this message is clearly internalized by the students. The school also recognizes the low level of educational preparedness that many students coming into the school may have received, and they direct significant resources and support to helping students address their academic challenges. In fall 2010, 96% of students returned to GCCP for the upcoming school year, a strong retention rate compared to the 50% dropout rate for Chicago Public Schools. The school currently has its first class of seniors, so graduation rates will not be known until spring 2012. GCCP is the top performing open-enrollment high school on Chicago's south side and the third highest ranked high school across the entire City in student academic growth from freshman to junior year based on the ACT.

- *To develop in youth the discipline necessary to succeed in their future professions.*

See above; discipline is extremely high at GCCP, with a system of demerits and other consequences that students understand and work to avoid. GCYC provides a more relaxed environment, but still has a good structure of rules and expectations (around such issues as use of particular spaces and equipment, respect for staff, or violent behavior). GCYC also provides ways for youth and staff to productively address conflicts or behavioral issues.

- *To teach students to honor their community.*

Students and youth center users are encouraged to give back to their community through service, mentoring and re-engaging as alumni of the programs.

- *To provide a wide range of programming, events and social support for the community.*

GCYC is well-used throughout its open hours for a variety of programs and events – mostly by youth, but there is increasing attention to providing opportunities for the families of youth and for adults in the community.

Interviewees considered the GCYC/GCCP campus a highly successful project, in terms of its design, its program, and its impact to date. The project is still fairly new, so some aspects of operations, programming and community relations are still being worked out, and some impacts on youth, families and the neighborhood will not be fully evident until many years down the road. However, the project has substantially shifted perceptions of neighborhood safety and has expanded the educational, job training and recreational opportunities for local youth. Both GCYC and GCCP are seen as positive, productive, attractive, safe and welcoming facilities that address important community needs.



SELECTION COMMITTEE COMMENTS

The Selection Committee discussion on the Gary Comer campus focused on the quality of program execution, design quality, replicability as a community model, and what this project has to teach us about urban interventions in neighborhoods like South Chicago. There was significant praise for the layered integration of school and after school programming, and for the relationships among participants that the project continues to facilitate. Early measures of success indicate that the staff and facility efficiencies found in the sharing of space have fostered nearly seamless cross programming, and have supported the growth of the school. Projected success rates in college preparation and the reduction of violence in and around the neighborhoods of the complex all speak to the excellence of the project.

Design themes identified by the SC included significant praise for the internal transparency and sectional character of the structures. The capacity to see through one activity into another within and between campuses enlivens the spaces and increases the capacity to support the program of behavior and, especially, the discipline encouraged by the leadership. The sectional properties of the design reinforce this transparency offering framed views to the neighborhood throughout the building, even as it limits views into the facility for security reasons.

How replicable is the project? Discussion on the fortress-like exterior and bullet proof glass used in the campus led the committee to wonder aloud if traditional forms of street friendly urbanism were possible in this location. That said, the “eyes on the street” in the building appear to act as a deterrent to crime. The imperative to provide a safe haven in a distressed neighborhood was seen as critical to the success of the project. Another dimension of replicability is its dependence on the unusual generosity of a single donor organization over twenty years. A final concern was the issue of charter schools and their viability in delivering quality education to the full population over time. In the end, there was no Committee consensus on the replicability of the project. There was, however, clarity that it was a well crafted project directly responsive to the circumstances within which it is operating.

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