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District 287 wins construction honors for NEC

By **Brian Rosemeyer** on February 14, 2013

Choice Award given to the innovative new facility

Intermediate District 287's newly opened North Education Center in northern New Hope sets a modern example for constructing education facilities with innovative building techniques, sustainable features and a tailored approach to educational needs.

Minnesota Construction Association recognized the new building as exemplary in awarding the NEC with its 2013 Choice Award.

The annual award honors one project that was completed as a result of resourceful blending of construction techniques and professionals.

Facilities Director of District 287 Tom Shultz said he was proud of the award and the team that made the NEC a reality.

"You could look at it to say that this was the best overall construction project in the state this year," Shultz said. "It means that we're doing things right."

The awards are judged by the association's Awards Committee and are based on a combination of the following: community service, professional team, strong leadership, aesthetics, blending of progressive business and financial methods, creative use of material, public and private involvement and cooperation and onsite safety.



The award-winning North Education Center in New Hope. (Submitted photo)

One aspect of the NEC project that helped to win the award was the unique method of “best value bidding.”

Shultz said the process differs from traditional methods in that it focuses around the overall cost of ownership to the district as compared to strictly choosing a contractor offering the lowest bid.

The idea is simple, yet possibly often overlooked; if you want to build a building, don’t cut corners to bring down your initial investment — build to reduce cost of ownership over the life of the building, energy expenses and longevity of materials.

“If I’m the owner, I’m not the expert [in construction],” Shultz said. “I’m asking the experts to tell me how much it’s going to cost, and where the risks are in the building. The process doesn’t focus solely on price, it focuses on finding the best contractor to give you the best building.”

From the bidding process, the district resolved to hire Eden Prairie-based JE Dunn Construction, which also won the association’s General Contractor of the Year Award in 2013.

“[JE Dunn’s contractor] had studied this project, and he had gone over everything,” Shultz said. “He knew the site, he knew the limitations and everything that contributed to it. He had a plan in place on how he was going to build this building. The other two contractors didn’t. If you come in and say ‘well, I’ve built a lot of buildings, and I’m good at it,’ that doesn’t impress me.”

District 287 worked closely with JE Dunn and TSP, Inc. on the design end to construct a building that met the needs of the staff and student body at the NEC.

Features such as demountable walls, wide hallways and calming rooms are specifically tailored to the day-to-day work at NEC.

District 287 customizes unique services for its member-district’s most challenging students, including special education, testing and assessment, employment enhancement skills and others.

“We went through a pretty involved design process with the program staff to meet the program needs and put it together to make this building,” Shultz said. “And it worked out phenomenally well.”

Aside from classroom features, the NEC boasts a number of innovative sustainable features.

For example, the building utilizes geothermal heating and cooling, which, Shultz said, is extremely efficient. Shultz continued to say that the NEC is believed to be 67 percent more efficient than a building built simply “to code.”

Every light fixture in the school is integrated in a low-voltage system with its own Internet Protocol address, which allows administrators and teachers to dim lights accordingly from a laptop or computer.

Each room also has occupancy sensors, which can automatically adjust temperatures based on

the number of people in the room. Or, if the room is vacant, reduce heating and cooling completely.

The details in the school's energy system are extensive, which add up to real savings and a less environmental impact.

"Our energy enhancements have a five-year payback," Shultz said. "So that within five years we've paid for, in energy savings, the added features of our energy system."

Shultz used an example in that, if energy costs equal three dollars per square-foot for a code building, it costs the NEC only one dollar per square-foot. He said that in the NEC's 157,000 square-feet, potential savings are around \$314,000 a year.



The cafeteria of the NEC features heated floors and a full-service cafe. (Submitted photo)

The project also remained on a tight timeframe and was well-funded and on target financially.

"I would give my budget report to the school board once a month," Shultz said. "And it was four words; 'on time, on budget.' And my last report was; 'on time, on budget, done.'"

The total cost of the project, including acquisition, demolition and construction, was around \$35 million. Groundbreaking was established at the end of March of 2011, and ribbon cutting took place on Aug. 23, 2012.

Shultz said the award-winning NEC stands as a benchmark of the technique and innovation school district's can use in constructing a building to last and fit the needs of its students.

"A tour came through last week and they looked at the building as an example of how to build for the future," Shultz said. "School districts are starting to look more not to build something just based on price, but they're building for cost of ownership over the lifetime of the building. [The NEC] was a very big success."

Intermediate School District 287 serves students from the following member districts: Brooklyn Center, Eden Prairie, Edina, Hopkins, Minnetonka, Osseo, Orono, Richfield, Robbinsdale, St. Louis Park, Wayzata and Westonka.

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