

# CORNERSTONE

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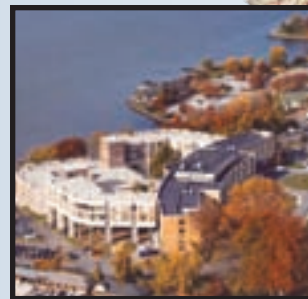
Featuring AGC NYS:

Fall 2010

# BUILD NEW YORK



# AWARDS





**Award Winner: RPI West Hall**

The need to repair West Hall, acquired by RPI in 1953, was apparent. The 1869 former Troy Hospital and 1922 Catholic Central High School had fallen into severe disrepair. The previous commitments of funds for West Hall were barely enough to maintain the operation of this dilapidated U.S. National Historic Registered Building - a notable example of Second Empire Architecture by Architect Marcus F. Cummings.

A 1989 architectural report indicated the buildings ornate mansard system would fail by early 2000 and large portions of the rotting facade could fail at any moment. Temporary protection was placed around the building to protect campus population and in 2004, armed with a \$150,000 Campus Heritage Initiative Grant, RPI assembled a team for a significant restoration.

Over the next five years West Hall underwent a dynamic revitalization with the guidance of architect John G. Waite Associates, RPI, engineers Ryan-Biggs and construction managers Sweet Constructors, a division of The VMJR Companies. The team was immediately challenged by site accessibility, decaying wood, failing metals, deteriorated masonry, budget constraints, and a 100% occupied building.

The process of fund allocation while addressing priorities was at best a difficult one. Windows were rotted and had not seen paint in 50 years, the chimney structures were decaying and various interior walls showed signs of distress. Frequent meetings over five years gave the team the opportunity to customize schedules and phase for the various building components (windows, roofing, doors, limestone replacement, brick repainting, cast iron railing and fence, site work, foundations, utilities, etc). The challenge was to prioritize the necessary repairs and schedule them within the allotted time frame while

maintaining the annual allocated funds.

Challenges of this unique restoration included the lighting, windows and the site work. Most of the remaining exterior decorative lighting was deteriorated beyond repair, but after much research, original light fixture molds were found in an Ohio foundry. With some modern integration, iden-



tical replacement lights now include compact fluorescent bulbs and polycarbonate lamps. In harmony with the lighting and to maintain the same features of West Hall from over 100 years ago the windows had to be saved. In the end the top floor mansard windows has to be replaced but the remaining 200 plus wood units were completely restored.

West Hall sits on a steeply sloping clay site with many underground utilities of unknown origin. Working closely with site engineers, Clough Harbor Associates site design changed almost daily. A variety of large retaining walls created flat areas to accommodate future lifts and maintenance equipment. Utilities including water, steam, electrical, communications and storm systems were reworked and updated as necessary. Sprinkler systems, low maintenance landscaping and an in-ground radiant snowmelt system were created.

After five years of intensive efforts by the project team this 140 year-old building has been restored to its origi-

nal grandeur. A registered historic landmark with subtle modernization, it recently received the NYS Preservation Leagues 2010 Award for Project Excellence recognizing meaningful accomplishments in the field of historic preservation.

**TEAM MEMBERS**

**Construction Manager/General Contractor:**  
**VMJR Companies, LLC**  
**Sweet Constructors**

**Owner: Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute**

**Architect:**  
**John G. Waite Associates, Architects PLLC**

**Engineers:**  
**Ryan-Biggs Associates (Structural & Façade)**  
**CHA, Inc.(Site)**

**Contributing Team Members:**  
 Thatcher Brook Millwork & Door  
 Monahan & Loughlin  
 KMI Roofing  
 Frank J. Ryan & Sons Painting  
 NS Associates