Learning Landscapes Receives “Entrepreneurial American Community Award”

Innovative program transforms urban schoolyards into attractive and safe multi-use public spaces specific to communities’ wants and needs

DENVER/WASHINGTON, D.C. (April 8, 2009) — Forty-eight playgrounds and counting. Through the generous support of Denver voters, foundation grants, and grassroots efforts, Denver's children now have safer and healthier places to play. This week, Learning Landscapes, a program of the College of Architecture and Planning at the University of Colorado Denver—and a partnership project with Denver Public Schools—has been recognized for bringing together the organizations and elements needed to transform Denver’s elementary school playgrounds and surrounding neighborhoods through its design of new, safe, multi-dimensional play areas.

Named the recipient of the 2009 Entrepreneurial American Community Award by the Partners for Livable Communities (Partners) at the Celebration of Vision & Community Spirit Awards event on April 7 in Washington, D.C., Partners President Bob McNulty describes the award given to Learning Landscapes: “Through vision and dedication, Learning Landscapes has grown to become one of the most vital resources within Denver’s communities. Cities across the country should look to this program when developing their outdoor play spaces for children and families.”

The Entrepreneurial American Community Award acknowledges the civic capacity building, commitment, vision and entrepreneurial spirit of a community. “Communities honored with this award are true innovators and have found success in providing unique solutions to local problems,” said Lois A. Brink, MLA, professor and director of Learning Landscapes at UC Denver’s College of Architecture and Planning. “Learning Landscapes was inspired by the children and their families who sought to fulfill their potential in learning and physical activity.”

Earlier this fall, Denver voters showed their support for the Learning Landscapes program and other Denver Public School initiatives by passing a $450 million school district bond. A portion of this bond will fund the capital costs and construction to complete Learning Landscapes on the remaining 37 schoolyards and 17 other schoolyards in Denver, creating the nation’s first district-wide schoolyard renovation program. “Community buy-in and national awareness created by awards like this validates the forward-thinking aspects of the City of Denver and its significance as a national model for urban cities,” said Brink.

“This is a highly-valued partnership for DPS,” said Denver Public Schools’ Superintendent Tom Boasberg. “One that brings an innovative program to our young students and our
communities, improves the appeal of our schoolyards, and utilizes the emerging talents of students in the College of Architecture and Planning at UC Denver. I’m pleased that this collaboration has caught the attention of a national award recognition program.”

The elementary schools within DPS that are slated to receive Learning Landscapes in 2009 include: Amesse, Archuleta, Blair, Bradley, Bryant Webster, Cole, Columbian, Columbine, Grant Ranch, Green Valley, Greenwood, Howell, Johnson, Lowry, Maxwell, Palmer, Place Bridge Academy, Roberts, Samuels, Sandoval, Stedman, Trevista, Waller, and Westerly Creek.

Learning Landscapes are more than playgrounds. Not only do they encompass play equipment, but the landscapes also provide natural habitat areas to rejuvenate entire school campuses, having a dramatic effect on children and community behavioral patterns. “We have tracked statistically significant decreases in sedentary behavior and corresponding increases in levels of physical activity. Some of the Learning Landscapes which include vegetable gardens also have experienced significant increases in children’s positive attitudes toward fresh fruits and vegetables,” added Brink.

On April 16, the DPS Board of Education will officially acknowledge this award in a presentation of a proclamation to the partners involved in Learning Landscapes program.

This year, Partners honored a total of eight individuals, organizations, and communities throughout the country for their stewardship and innovation in the improvement of quality of life. For the last 30 years, the non-profit organization has celebrated the leadership of people, institutions, and partnerships that have discovered unique assets that communities can build upon to become more livable. Formed around a principle that quality of life is a key resource to be capitalized upon, Partners believes the powers and skills of individual citizens are prime resources to build a better future. “Both businesses and the civic community have a common interest in ensuring equity and livability,” added McNulty. “Beauty and heritage is a unique asset for long-term value, and important institutions can become fulcrums of change to reflect the needs of their communities.”

For more information on other honorees and Partners’ previous awards programs, please visit [http://www.mostlivable.org/livability-bulletin/index.php](http://www.mostlivable.org/livability-bulletin/index.php).

The [College of Architecture and Planning](http://www.ucdenver.edu) is among the largest colleges of architecture and related design and planning disciplines in the U.S. Located on the University of Colorado Denver’s downtown campus and the University of Colorado-Boulder, CAP brings together faculty, students and practitioners who share common pursuits in communities of interest including: emerging practices in design, sustainable urbanism, the creation of healthy environments and the preservation of cultural heritage. CAP is one of 13 schools and colleges at UC Denver. The University offers more than 100 degrees and serves more than 28,000 students in Metro Denver and online. For additional news and information, please visit the [UC Denver newsroom](http://www.ucdenver.edu).