

**Category:** 1 – Contribution to the Community

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**Project Name:** Mile High United Way Morgridge Center for Community Change,  
Davis Architects

“This was a situation of when is a building more than a building,” said Christine Benero, Mile High United Way President/CEO. “For us, it’s when a building becomes the embodiment of our mission. It’s the manifestation of 128 years of a vision that our founders held and that we’ve been privileged to steward.” Mile High United Way (MHUW) has been a catalyst for social change since opening its doors as the first United Way in the country over 125 years ago. Today, the organization works with hundreds of local non-profit partners, government agencies, policy-makers and businesses to deliver services centered on building self-sufficiency and personal success.

To continue realizing these valuable goals, the group needed a building that would enable them to support the people of Denver well into the future. Mile High United Way Morgridge Center for Community Change is the definition of a building contributing to the community. The 63,000-square-foot community hub located in downtown Denver’s historic Curtis Park neighborhood. The mission-driven building is home to a large conference and collaboration area, Mile High United Way headquarter, a number of program spaces, tenant space for other community support agencies, and a below-grade parking garage.

### **SPECIAL NEEDS MET**

Due to PCL’s longstanding relationship with MHUW as an annual contributor, MHUW engaged the design-build team of PCL and Davis Partnership early in the development process to understand their needs. When choosing a location for their new building, MHUW wanted to be sure they were in a place that clients could easily access. After considering and reviewing over 20 different sites, the entire development team worked together to select the Curtis Park neighborhood because it’s close to other nonprofit organizations, part of Denver’s

underdeveloped downtown, and incidentally near where Mile High United Way was founded in 1887.

With the site purchased, the team sought design approval from local area partners in order to begin development. One critical challenge was to create a design that would satisfy the historic Curtis Park Neighborhood Association while adhering to MHUW's budget and design criteria. The design-build team and MHUW, invited Curtis Park leaders to provide their vision and input into the design. Through these meetings, the team realized that their vision of the building was not aligning with the community's. In order to understand their needs better, the group walked through the neighborhood with key leaders to have a visual explanation. After this, the team fully grasped the history and essence of the area, and was able to get to the root of local concerns, incorporated this knowledge into the project and went back to the drawing board. Some of the newly added features include the entire facade of the building being articulated in differing widths and heights relating to the scale, rhythm and character in an effort to match the feeling of the row homes throughout the surrounding neighborhood. The blue glazing and powerful rectangular forms create the iconic image parts of the building and gateways into the neighborhood beyond. The Curtis Park Neighbors group also provided input that turned the Morgridge Center into more than just an office building, "they went with us to every hearing," Benero said of the group.

## **COMPANY AND EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION AND/OR DONATION OF MANPOWER**

PCL worked with MHUW very early in the process and donated our preconstruction efforts. This support included over a year and a half of cost analysis for the various sites the design-build team considered. PCL has always been invested in the community of Denver, as Christine Benero describes, "It is PCL's deep commitment to our community that sets it apart. Your philanthropic investments and the countless hours of volunteer time your employees invest in changes lives. It is evident in the culture of PCL and was evident with every interaction we had in the construction of our new home. PCL does not just build buildings, it builds hope."

## **IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY**

"As the new gateway to Curtis Park, the Mile High United Way Morgridge Center for Community Change is uniquely positioned to expand opportunities for Metro Denver," describes Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper, "as the United Way network continues to improve the lives of families and individuals across the state." The new building houses not only the MHUW headquarters, but also a number of programs and initiative that support the community.

CenturyLink's Mile High United Way 2-1-1 Center, is a free and confidential community referral service that connects callers with resources which provide food, shelter, rent assistance, clothing, child care options, legal assistance and other services to meet basic needs. Bridging the Gap, is a program that helps young adults formerly in foster care address their needs related to education, employment, financial literacy, health and leadership development. CoBank Leadership Center, is 6,300 square feet of conference space for community collaboration, available at no cost for nonprofit use, and hosted 356 events with 9,829 external visitors within the first 18 weeks of opening. The Comcast Digital Literacy Community Center, provides access to state-of-the-art technology and training opportunities to the public. Café United, is a full service café operated by Work Options for Women, a program with a vision similar to MHUW's, "the empowerment of women through the creation of paths to self-sufficiency." Finally, the Morgridge Center is home to Goodwill Industries and the Metro Denver Homeless Initiative, both independent businesses.

Christine Benero describes the building as a "mission-based community hub where we will collectively identify and solve community-wide problems". This vision and the programs offered at the Morgridge Center will have an immeasurable impact for the community today and for years to come. Recently, MHUW received the award for "Community Impact Project" at the inaugural Denver Business Journal Real Estate Champions Awards.

## **HISTORICAL OR LONG-RANGE VALUE TO THE COMMUNITY**

When selecting the site of the new home to MHUW, the area of Denver it would be located in was also an added factor. MHUW had the desire to select an underdeveloped part of metro Denver with the intention of improving and supporting that neighborhood for years to come. Today, the changes and impact to the historic Curtis Park neighborhood can already be seen.

"Mile High United Way's new headquarters will yield a tangible return on investment," said City Councilman Albus Brooks of District 8, "catalytic in revitalizing our diverse community from grassroots to grass tops." From enhancing the pedestrian experience by widening the sidewalks and adding green buffers to supporting the immediate neighborhood with programs and services, the Center is changing history in Curtis Park. Christine Benero describes the long-range value to the community as "a long-term investment in the redevelopment of this unique area".

## **ENVIRONMENT/SAFETY**

Safety at PCL is more than a word or something that is preached by our project staff at the jobsites, it is a culture that starts at the top of our organization and is embraced by every employee no matter their position, location, or experience. Our safety program is not just inspections and documentation requirements, but it is behavioral based. We believe in having workers who think safe and act safe, and demonstrate that culture to other workers around them to ensure they look after one other.

The core of PCL's safety program that was implemented at the MHUW project began in the estimating phase as we evaluated the risks within the different scopes of work. Before the actual construction began, we would recognize any hazards with a Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) prior to and then each day complete a Pre-Job Safety Instruction (PSI) at the start of each task and after break by each crew. All of these steps provided the framework for the necessary awareness and team work since each task was completed by multiple workers.

In addition to the required paperwork and planning, the project team also implemented other techniques to engage worker involvement, awareness, and the behavioral safety. For example, the project management team came up with incentives to promote worker engagement. One such incentive was to reward acts of safety that went above and beyond the project safety requirements; all our first line supervisors were required to carry gift cards to give to workers who demonstrating commitment above the guidelines. This promoted more awareness and it later became more about the awareness rather than the reward. This dedication to safety on the MHUW Morgridge Center for Community Change is apparent with 127,947 total man hours on the job and had zero time lost and no fatalities on the job.

The design-build team considered every factor of the environment during the design and preconstruction phase of the project. Using innovative solutions such as utilizing roof detention and a rain garden for storm water, the team was able to surpass the original goal of LEED Silver certification and received a certification in the Gold category.









