

AGC ACE Awards 2021

Category 12 – Best Building Project - General Contractor (\$40 - \$70 Million)

General Contractor – GH Phipps Construction Companies

Project Name – Denver Botanic Gardens Freyer – Newman Center

A Celebration of Growth

The relationship between GH Phipps Construction Companies and Denver Botanic Gardens dates back to 1964, starting with the construction of the Boettcher Memorial Conservatory and Horticulture Hall, now the Boettcher Memorial Center, and now includes over 17 projects dedicated to furthering the Gardens' mission, programs and services. Built in the spirit of fusing science, art, and education; the Freyer – Newman Center is the crowning jewel and the final chapter of a four-phase master development plan that was planted in 2007. GH Phipps is honored to have been a part of each of these phases including the ACE Award winning Science Pyramid in 2015.

A LEED Gold building, the \$40 million Freyer – Newman Center contains an array of over 100,000 samples of beautifully preserved vascular plants and fungi in the herbaria, six classrooms, labs, art galleries, an large auditorium/theater, library, archives, offices, storage and staff parking.. Walking through the facility, the essence of nature, stunning architecture, and gems behind every door beckon visitors from the moment they arrive. The immense structure echoes a modern twist on the grandeur of Smithsonian architecture that is both magnificent and inviting.

Plowing through Challenges

The construction process was a testament to the enduring roots between GH Phipps and Denver Botanic Gardens. Although anticipated to open on schedule in the early Spring of 2020, unforeseen circumstances that plagued the world took hold and delayed construction of the center. During this season of unknowns, Project Manager Adam Tormohlen and Superintendent Todd Swenson worked closely with Denver Botanic Gardens' CEO Brian Vogt to keep the project on track through uncertainty and to complete the Center at the highest level of quality possible. Adam, a veteran of projects with Denver Botanic Gardens, worked tirelessly through scheduling issues as they arose, and the team's constant perseverance was well rewarded as the Center was finished not long after the anticipated construction completion date in May of 2020.

Growing the Next Generations

The Freyer-Newman Center, designed by Davis Partnership Architects, features 100,000 square feet of space dedicated to the education, research, and artistic representation of botanical life. This is clearly conveyed from even before you step foot in the facility with the IA steel structure formed in the shape of a falling elliptic leaf guarding the outdoor pathways. Once inside, a sense of awe overwhelms the visitors as they enter a symmetrical atrium adorned with beautiful wood paneling and structural steel pylons that bring to mind a flourishing canopy of trees. Illuminated with natural sunlight from the strategically positioned skylight windows, the interior atrium room also features wood shutters that disperse the sunlight evenly throughout the room without raising the temperature regardless of the time of day. This, coupled with a substantial solar array on the roof, provides the center with power and sustainability.

The interior architecture is reminiscent of mid-century modern influence with a minimalist design that is harmonized with wide open areas. A 10-foot by 40-foot LED panel showcases 8k video content that brings in stunning vistas from around Colorado. With the inclusion of six classrooms, and science labs containing state of the art scientific equipment, the Center's main function of education is further expressed as students of all grades can utilize these resources to explore the natural world around them. The extensive Helen Fowler Library, features private study rooms, rare books reading room, a kid's area and space for consultation by master gardeners. Three state of the art galleries feature exhibits by both local and internationally legendary artists. When breaks are required from the pursuit of knowledge, visitors can enjoy refreshments and a snack from the fragrant Copper Door Coffee Roasters shop located on the first floor. To add a final piece to the marriage of science, art and education, the Center also includes an auditorium capable of seating 265 patrons and accessibility spaces for visitors with limited mobility. This space functions as a high-tech movie theater with a 4k laser projector and massive 71.1 Dolby surround sound system.

Nature First

As a certified LEED Gold building for new construction and major renovations, considerable and careful thought went into every stage of the Freyer-Newman Center to demonstrate exemplary leadership in sustainable building practices. With construction on an active campus, care was taken to reroute any curious visitors and correct their path back to exploring other sections of the Gardens. Beyond the safety of students and tourists, there was also considerable attention paid to the preservation of the plant life found nearby, some of which included rare specimens. Crew members maintained consistency in pathways through the facilities to the site with strategic fencing around the construction area in a way that avoided unnecessary stress on the surrounding vegetation. In the promotion of sustainability and energy

alternatives, a solar array on the exterior roof supplemented the building's electricity and provided cost saving benefits while staying green.

Harmony in Growth

To successfully execute a project of this magnitude and scope, it is crucial to foster precise collaboration with the owner, design team, and subtrades. The philosophy and approach was that our construction team was not only made up of GH Phipps employees but included hands-on partnerships with both the owner, Brian Vogt, and Davis Partnership Architects. The long-standing synergy of this triad came together again on this project resulting in zero workplace incidents, persevered through a pandemic, and exceeded the expectations of the City. Adam Tormohlen, the Project Manager, commented on the nature of the team, *"This really was a good partnership and we all left the project with so much respect for each other that will be a lasting positive relationship"* This strategic collaboration between Denver Botanic Gardens and GH Phipps has been an excellent example of natural harmony between owner and contractor. The Freyer-Newman Center is one of the masterpieces of this flourishing relationship.

Elevating Denver's Canopies

Before construction commenced, Davis Partnership Architects and Denver Botanic Gardens canvassed neighboring residents to garner feedback on the proposed project and were met with a very positive response when addressing their concerns. Along with generous donations from private donors, including Robert and Judi Newman and John and Ginny Freyer, Denver Botanic Gardens was one of the first organizations to receive funding from the Elevate Denver Bond Program whose primary goal was to deliver projects that are designed to enhance and strengthen the growth of the City.

During the press release, Mayor Michael Hancock held high praise for the project, *"As one of the first Elevate Denver-supported projects to break ground, the Freyer - Newman Center is an outstanding example of how these community approved investments can move a project to reality and enhance our world-class museums."* Denver Botanic Gardens CEO, Brian Vogt echoed the Mayor's sentiments, *"We are all filled with gratitude for the completion of the final chapter of our Master Development Plan with this stellar project. Deep appreciation goes to Denver voters for their support of the 2017 General Obligation Bond and to all of the donors, designers, builders, neighbors, staff and volunteers who took us to the finish line."*

Spanning over 24 acres and hosting millions of visitors each year, Denver Botanic Gardens has provided a new facility that gives more reasons to stay longer than the average two hours. The first floor of the

Center can be enjoyed by members of the public without buying a ticket. The galleries and auditorium upstairs are included in a regular member visit or paid admission.

A Blooming Celebration of Life

With the completion of the Master Development Plan between GH Phipps and Denver Botanic Gardens, the Freyer – Newman Center is certainly the high point ending in a closing chapter. An interactive monument to the achievements of science, the allure of art, and the power of education, the Center embraces people from around the globe and encourages them to peer a little closer into the natural world around them.









