



Jan. 18, 2008

The Hyde Park Historical Society has awarded the 2008 Marian and Leon Despres Preservation Award to the University of Chicago Medical Center for "the excellent restoration" of the façade and of the first floor main lobby of the American School of Correspondence Building, 850 East 58th Street.

"It was a rare pleasure to work on this renovation and an honor to have it merit such a distinguished award," said Mark Urquhart, vice president for facilities, design and construction at the Medical Center. "This was a classic building, the oldest structure on the Medical Center campus and it had a period charm to it that we felt we had to preserve. The facilities, design and construction team did a phenomenal job."

The award — given in honor of Marian and Leon Despres, whose dedication and leadership were instrumental to the preservation movement in Hyde Park and Chicago — recognizes the Medical Center's outstanding contribution to the preservation of Hyde Park's architectural heritage.

"The Medical Center has been a fine steward of this landmark building," notes the Society.

Built in 1906-07 as the headquarters of a large education-by-mail school, the American School structure is "remarkably original in design, while reflecting the dignity of traditional academic architecture," according to the Chicago Department of Planning and Development's Landmarks Division. "In composition and detailing, it is a masterpiece of early-20th century Arts & Crafts-style design."

The architects, brothers Irving and Allen Pond, were known for their buildings' exceptional brickwork, asymmetrical massing and distinctive decorative detail. Buildings designed by Pond & Pond were "notable for their exceptionally well-detailed craftsmanship," notes the landmarks office, "as well as their influence on turn-of-the-century architectural modernism."

The American School had a long and distinguished history in correspondence education at the site before moving to Lansing, Illinois, in 1996. More than three million students have enrolled, including many in the entertainment and sports fields who had to travel extensively during their teen years and could not attend a regular school.

Famous former students include 1950s pop singers the Everly Brothers, both Don and Phil ("Wake Up Little Susie"); tennis star Andre Agassi, winner of 60 tournament titles, including all four Grand Slam events, plus an Olympic gold medal; and Donny and Marie Osmond, childhood TV stars who went on to second and third careers as recording artists and then as Broadway stars.

The American School Building was declared a Chicago Landmark in April, 1995, and purchased for \$3.2 million by the Medical Center in 1997. It served for several years as a headquarters for other construction projects, including the Comer Children's Hospital, before undergoing its own \$8.5 million renovation. It still houses Medical Center's planning, design & construction office, alongside office space for patient safety, risk management, communications, capital budget and control, the Phoenix Project and the team designing the New Hospital Pavilion.

The Historical Society will present the Despres Award to the Medical Center at their annual dinner on February 23.

University of Chicago News Office
5801 South Ellis Avenue - Room 200
Chicago, Illinois 60637-1473