

AROUND COBB ■ AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS COMPETITION

Architecture student earns national award for sustainable design entry

Staff reports

MARIETTA — Laura Sherman was working in her Integrated Design Studio class last semester when she stumbled upon a call for entries in The American Institute of Architects student design competition that seemed perfectly suited to her latest architecture project.

Her design was recently selected by the AIA Committee on the Environment, in partnership with the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, as one of 10 recipients of the AIA COTE Top Ten for Students.

The national competition, now in its second year, recognizes 10 exceptional studio projects that fuse innovative, regenerative strategies within broader architectural design concepts. Sherman's project was selected based on her integrated approach to architecture, natural systems and technology.

Her project, "O2O4W: Oxygen House in the Old Fourth Ward District," proposes a new facility on the site of the soon-to-be-demolished Martin Luther King Jr. Natatorium in Atlanta. The MLK Natatorium was a social and activity hub for the surrounding neighborhoods but was determined to be structurally unsound. As part of their studio design proposals, students were required to introduce a new community amenity, along with a center for lung health and well-being, explained Edwin Akins, associate professor of architecture, who teaches the Integrated Design Studio course in the College of Architecture and Construction Management at Kennesaw State.

To meet the requirements, Sherman's design included a community room, an outdoor pool with supporting facilities, a child-care center, an extension of the existing gymnasium and a public cafe. As part of the studio course, students were asked to combine a lung cancer or asthma consultation clinic with their public outreach programs.

Sherman explained that this was very difficult because the programs introduced dissimilar requirements for private and public spaces.

"The goal was to design this space to complement each other," Sherman said. "A community center is very social and open to



Laura Sherman's design was recently selected by the AIA Committee on the Environment, in partnership with the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, as one of 10 recipients of the AIA COTE Top Ten for Students. / Photo by David Caselli

the public, and as a counterpoint, a lung cancer clinic should have privacy and limited access."

The ground-level community center that she designed acts as a pillar to the upper-level consultation clinic by providing community support and awareness, she explained.

"This project was about balancing many things: technology, sustainability and the structure of the building. I also had to consider how it feels to be a cancer patient or a resident of a neighborhood," she added.

To meet the requirements of the AIA competition, Sherman's project had to meet some additional criteria, which Sherman worked on between semesters with the help of faculty mentor Edwin Akins, who helped her to refine some of the technical aspects.

"Laura's work was clearly a synthesis of content from multiple courses into one studio project," said Akins. "She skillfully maneuvered her work through multiple scales to capture the experiences and technical documentation of a truly exceptional design proposal."

Akins said Laura and her classmates were a strong group who integrated their passion for learning and environmental stewardship into their assigned projects.

"I am so proud of her work and the work of all of our students in the Architecture department. They are a committed and talented group of young adults who are

proving to be true leaders in the field," he said.

The AIA competition program challenged students to submit projects that provide architectural solutions to protect and enhance the environment. Sherman said that the most interesting part of creating for the AIA competition — and architecture, in general — was trying to solve a complex problem through design.

"There is no perfect solution to any design problem," she added. "It just engages you in being creative."

The Athens native, whose mother worked as an architect at the University of Georgia, first learned that she wanted to study architecture while in high school, when she attended the Georgia Governor's Honors Program for visual arts. There, she recalled how much she enjoyed "making spaces."

Sherman's work has been honored a few times this year, leading up to the top AIA student award. She earned first place in the department's comprehensive design studio awards at Kennesaw State.

Sherman and two of her classmates were also the only three students in Georgia honored by the 2016 AIA Georgia Design and Honor Awards for their innovative design work. In addition to the Merit Award, Sherman also earned the People's Choice Award for her project.