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Green thumbs up for roof-top design

BY BECKY BERGMAN

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A
roof-top
garden in

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

A roof-top garden at the Community Health Center in Middletown was among the landscape design projects honored.

Middletown and a pond preserve in Westport are among the projects honored recently by the Connecticut Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

The Excellence Award for Corporate and Institutional Landscape Architectural Design went to Boston-based Robert Olson Associates for its work designing the rooftop garden at the Community Health Center in Middletown. The Excellence Award is the group's highest honor.

It was the first garden rooftop design in Connecticut for the firm and one of only a handful constructed in the state. The \$17 million, 48,000-square-foot Community Health Center was constructed last year on a dilapidated, asphalt parking lot on Main Street.

Installing rooftop irrigation is similar to setting up ground-level systems, said David Miller, a LEED-certified landscape architect at Robert Olson Associates.

"One of the things we had to figure out was how to run the system up through the core of the building," said Miller. "We had the elevator and other building components included, so it wasn't that difficult of a process once we knew where everything was and how it was going to fit."

Mark Masselli, who started the health clinic in town 40 years ago, envisioned a rooftop garden designed to absorb storm water runoff, cool the building and promote educational opportunities for students and visitors.

"The community surrounding us is important too. Primary care is only one piece of the puzzle," said Masselli. "People can't be healthy if their neighborhood isn't healthy."

The garden, which has 10 inches of soil, provides a habitat for butterflies and pollination for bees. Masselli coordinates with the nearby elementary school to maintain the plants and vegetables.

"Although not an entirely new practice, rooftop gardens and green roofs are becoming more common," said Barbara Yaeger, chairperson of the CTASLA Awards Committee and a self-employed landscape architect in Madison.

"As development becomes denser, the value of outdoor green space increases. Rooftops provide an ideal space that not only allows humans to interact with nature, but also provides added benefits of reduced heating and cooling expenses, increased wildlife habitat and storm water management," said Yaeger.

Towers|Golde LLC, a New Haven-based landscape architect firm, was honored this year for its work at the Gateway Community College. It also earned recognition in 2010 for its rooftop garden at the Betty Ruth & Milton B. Hollander Healing Garden at the Smilow Cancer Hospital at Yale.

The CTASLA recognized Erskine Middleleer Associates LLC in Georgetown with an award for its Sherwood Pond Preserve in Westport.

The site was formally occupied by Allen's Clam House, and purchased by the Town of Westport to protect it from developers. After a five-year design and permitting process, the park was constructed over a one-year period starting in 2009, according to Silvia Erskine, a principal at the design firm.

The firm transformed the gravel and asphalt parking areas into a park with walking paths and benches for viewing the flora and fauna of the marsh, and a kayak launch area.

"Each year it seems the projects emphasize more and more the importance of sustainability in designed and built landscapes, with more native plants and green infrastructure on a majority of the projects," said Yaeger.

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