

A Place of Beginnings--New Futures School

by Angela Atterbury

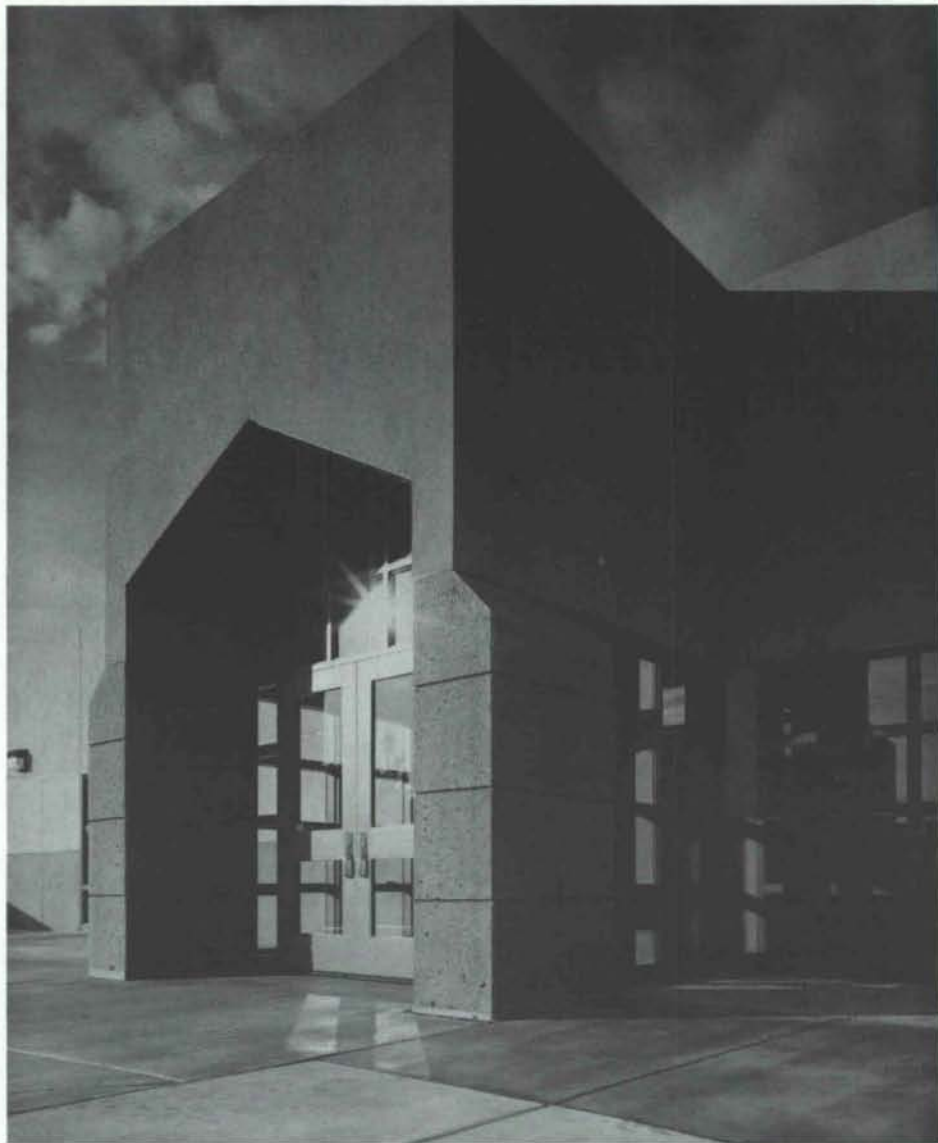
When selected to design an alternative school for the Albuquerque Public School System, the Dekker & Associates project team and Janice Sells of APS Facilities and Planning were faced with the elements basic to most projects--a strict budget to adhere to and a tight schedule. Unlike other projects, however, this one had to be designed with two unique considerations; to provide an adequate learning environment for pregnant teens, young mothers, as well as nurseries for their babies; and to design a space infused with hope for some of Albuquerque's greatest "at risk" teenagers, many already middle or high school dropouts.

"What was exciting about this project was being able to apply a design process whereby we as the architects got to actually invent something with our client because nothing else like this existed before. A lot of times architects don't get to be inventors like we did for this project," said Dale Dekker, Principal-in-Charge.

His clients were the highly dedicated administration and staff of New Futures, a school for pregnant teens and young mothers which had operated for several years at the site of the old Monroe Junior High School at the corner of Louisiana and Indian School Road. When APS selected Dekker for the project in May, 1987, the project team had just four months to work up a design on which construction began in September, 1987. The new building, constructed by Construction Contracting and Management Inc., is located on the northeast corner of the old Cortez Elementary School at 5400 Cutler NE. The school was ready for occupancy this past fall.

In order to meet such a condensed schedule, Dekker, along with APS and New Futures Principal Caroline Gaston, created the "B.P.C.", the Building Planning Committee made up of New Futures staff specially selected by the teachers, counselors and administrators at New Futures. Their purpose was to inform Dekker and his project team about the distinct philosophy of New Futures School, its history and background, and its future in order to facilitate the design process.

The project team then began to interview all school staff, discussing what aspects of the old facility they wished to maintain in the new school, and what innovations they would like to see incorporated. Special attention was paid to the grouping of nurseries convenient to the front of the school with outdoor access to play yards for each one.



New Futures School, Main entry.

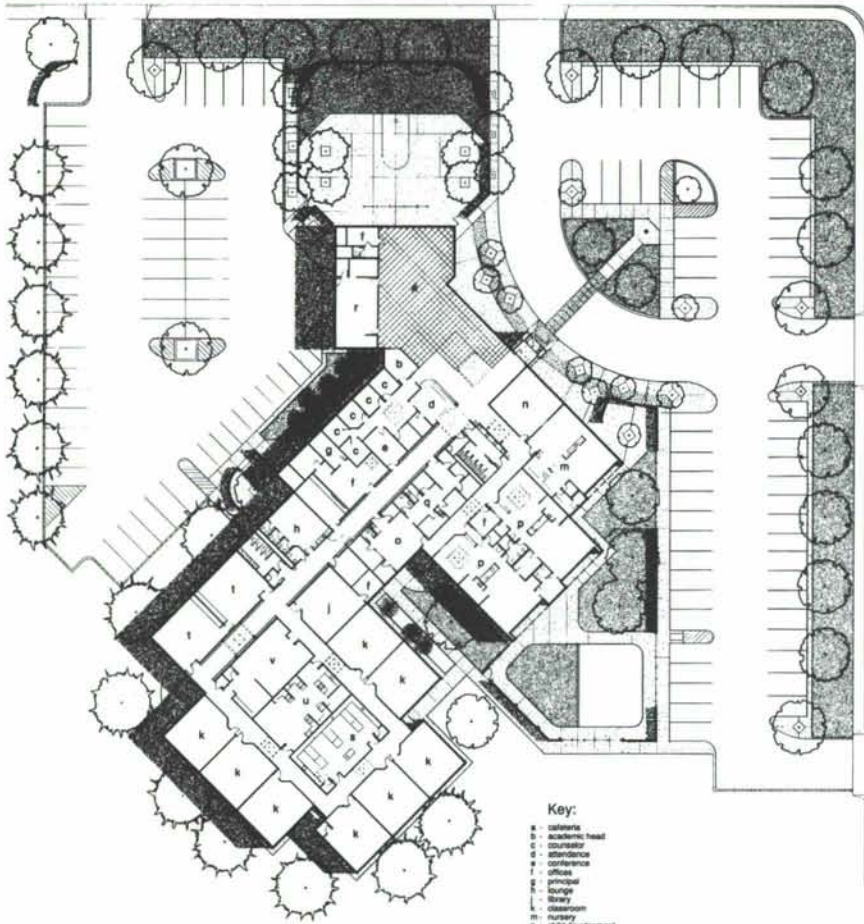
An energy-saving vestibule, flanked by two precast concrete columns, welcomes students, faculty & guests to NFS. (Precast columns donated by Ferreri Concrete Structures, Albuquerque)

Next, the Dekker and Associates project team interviewed the students to find out what elements the girls wanted in the new school. "We talked first to the girls that were pregnant, to determine what their needs were, then to the girls with babies, then to the girls with toddlers. Essentially, we were trying to get a feeling for what these girls did during the day, to get a focus on how their day went," Dekker said.

As a result, the floor plan totally reflects a combination of the way the school works with faculty, staff, students, and infants.

The main entrance of the school was designed for pick-up and drop-off of students who were pregnant or who had to negotiate babies and diaper bags in inclement weather. The cafeteria is at the front of the school and is used as a multi-functional space where students and their babies can wait for rides after school. Directly behind the open cafeteria space is the check-in area for all students and visitors. This open area, with windows which give a panoramic view of the Sandia Mountains, provides good security for the

Cutler Avenue N.E.



Key:

- cafeteria
- academic head
- counselor
- attendance
- conference
- office
- principal's lounge
- library
- classroom
- nursery
- child development
- nurse
- day care
- health clinic
- kitchen
- science
- math
- home arts
- business



NFS
New Futures School
5400 Cutler Avenue N.E.

school. The single entrance allows the check-in area to easily monitor everyone who enters and leaves the school.

Since the old school had a central hallway where students and their babies often congregated between classes, a similar hallway "spine" was designed by Dekker and Associates. This spine branches off into the nursery hall where three of the school's four nurseries are located; Tender Loving Care, for the infants from two weeks to four months, Cookie Monster, for "crawlers," babies aged from five through ten months, and Big Bird, for the "cruisers," babies aged from eleven through fifteen months. The other hallway contains students' classrooms, one area grouped for high school age students, and a smaller area for middle school. Both hallways adjoin to provide easy access to students and to the infants.

Palomas Drive N.E.



Location Map
NTS



The layout of the 30,000 square foot school makes the most efficient use of space possible. "The school has mostly useable space; it's not a lot of overhangs, covered courtyards, or that kind of thing," Dekker said. Because of the unique nature of the school and its curriculum, some of the classrooms have windows between them for monitoring by one teacher. One classroom may be engaged in a hands-on computer workshop, while another class is being taught in a traditional method. One teacher can thus cover both classes.

Saving money was also a prime consideration in the design and building of the school. The Dekker and Associates project team conducted an analysis of the equipment at the old school and decided to move the existing kitchen equipment to the new school. The old school's lockers were reconditioned and installed in the new facility.

"My mom is a welfare mother. We've lived on food stamps all of my life. I didn't want that, though, for me. I want my son to pull the world along with him, instead of letting the world drag him along."

Deidra C.
NFS Student

CBS Evening News, Sept., 1987

Measures such as these resulted in the school being constructed for \$1.37 million or \$45.67 per square foot.

With an approximate student population of 230 students and 90 infants at any given time, the school does not look overcrowded for its space. Its appearance, in fact, hints at a positive, cheerful place. Interior and exterior colors used for the building are shades of rose, pink and turquoise. "The girls wanted pinks and bright colors. They said they wanted it to look like a pleasant place to be, not like an institution," Dekker said. For this particular student population, Mrs. Gaston said color scheme and the overall feel of the school were highly crucial.

"You have to remember that this group of students has already given up and the regular school system has given up on them," she said. Many of the students come from troubled backgrounds; the emphasis of New Futures is to raise their self esteem, teach them how to be good parents while providing traditional secondary education, thus making them productive members of society. Each student is respected as an individual. Gaston said the design of the school had to reflect this, which, she says, "the new school does beautifully."

Gaston says the girls themselves are proud to have been included in the design process and to see some of their suggestions reflected in the new building. As a result, she says, they have a marked pride in the school. She related a story of how, recently, one student accidentally squirted ketchup on the cafeteria wall. The girl immediately went and got a cleaning rag from cafeteria staff and cleaned the wall without any prompting. "You would be hard pressed to see that occur at any school, anywhere," she said, smiling proudly. A.A.

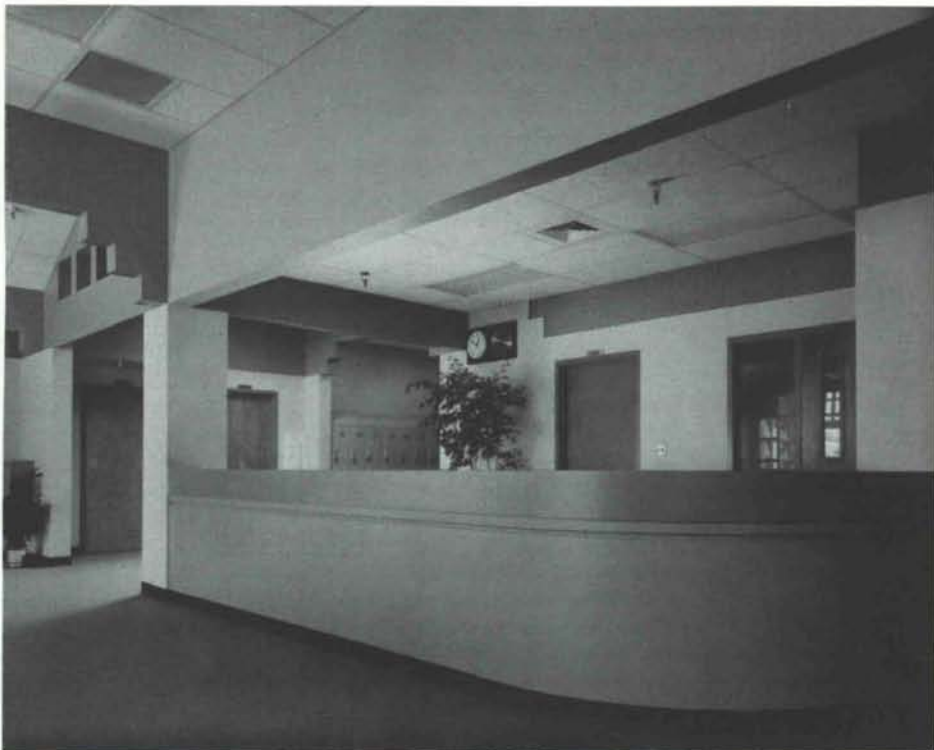


New Futures School, Northeast Facade.

Approach to main entry. Exterior treatment is a tricolored stucco in earth-tone hues with subtle accents at entries. Corners are accentuated by stepping the darker stucco shade up to the parapet.

Angela Atterbury, former local TV and print journalist, now owns Atterbury & Associates. Her firm provides marketing consultation to the accounting, architecture, engineering, law, medical, and planning professions. An Albuquerque resident, she also is a freelance writer.

The mission of New Futures School is to assist and parents to make responsible, informed decisions; to progress of their secondary education; to mature; to have healthy families; to become responsible parents (which for choice to release for adoption); and to become well-adjusted sufficient members of their communities.



New Futures School Attendance Desk.

Innovative use of drywall in a double-layered wall system and in playful corbels and cut-outs throughout the building creates a stimulating, yet sturdy and cost-effective learning environment for the special population of students and children who attend NFS. (Interiors by Black Tie Design, Albuquerque)

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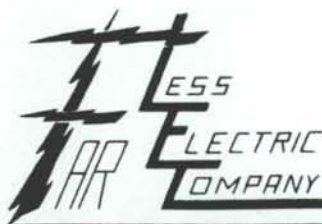
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