

Putting the focus on the environment - 10/18/2005

IHM renovation receives sixth award in two years

mswartz@monroenews.com

By MICHELLE SWARTZ

The sustainability renovation project at the IHM Motherhouse keeps winning awards.

This time, the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Motherhouse won a national award. The renovation project won a 2005 Design Honor Award from Faith and Form magazine and the Interfaith Forum on Religion, Art and Architecture.

The award complimented the IHM on its desire to preserve the historical aspect of the building.

“Before the renovation began in 2001, the sisters did extensive research in terms of making it an environmental-friendly environment,” said Molly Hunt, community coordinator at the IHM. “It’s ongoing. The sisters are committed to sustainability and recycling.”

Susan Maxman of Susan Maxman & Partners architectural firm, which was responsible for the renovation project, submitted an entry for the award. She cited how sustainability was exemplified in the renovation, such as the additional daylight throughout the facility, the geothermal aspect and the preservation of the beauty of historic structures.

The renovation included most of the 280-acre Motherhouse campus, including the addition of native flowers and prairie grasses. Natural light was added throughout the building and doors and windows were reused as part of the recycling process. An energy-efficient system called geothermal is also being used to heat and cool the Motherhouse. According to Ms. Hunt, it is the largest, privately funded geothermal field in the country.

She said that many people, visiting the Motherhouse for the first time since the project began, are amazed at the transformation.

“They look around and they can’t believe it. They are impressed,” she said. “I remember coming here as a child and so much of the history is still there. The architecture is still there. The design elements that I remember are still there.”

The credit, she says, goes to the sisters.

“They put so much thought and research into this project. The amount of consideration that the sisters gave is just phenomenal.”

This is the IHM's sixth award since 2003. The renovation has also won the Clean Air Excellence Award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; the Build Michigan Award; a Building Award from the Michigan Historic Preservation Network, and the 2004 Pyramid Award for Best Project Team.

"Since this is a national award, it gives it more clout," she said. "But we certainly value the local and state awards as well."

The IHM is hosting the Midwest Green Building Conference Wednesday and Thursday. The event is open to tradespeople, architects, interior designers, engineers, students and others interested in learning about sustainable building projects. For more information on the conference, call 240-9754.