APPLICATION BY

New Brunswick Development Corporation

FOR THE 2003

Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence

Lord Stirling Community School
New Brunswick, New Jersey
**PROJECT DATA**

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<th>Lord Redmond St., New Brunswick, NJ 08901</th>
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<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cpaladino@devco.org">cpaladino@devco.org</a></td>
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Please indicate how you learned of the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence. (Check all that apply).

- Direct Mailing
- Magazine Advertisement
- Previous RBA entrant
- Professional
- Newsletter
- Previous Selection Committee member
- Other (please specify)

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Signature
ABSTRACT

Please answer questions in space provided. Applicants should feel free to use photocopies of the application forms if needed. If possible, answers to all questions should be typed or written directly on the forms. If the forms are not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided on the original form.

Project Name: Lord Stirling Community School

Address: 101 Redmond Street  
City/State/ZIP: New Brunswick, NJ 08901

1. Give a brief overview of the project, including major project goals.

The Lord Stirling Community School is hailed as the first public school in New Jersey to be designed, developed and constructed as an urban redevelopment project. Developed by a private, not-for-profit community development corporation, the 103,000-square-foot school has become a model for urban school construction that brings the development of much needed educational facilities together with the planning and revitalization of a surrounding community. The development of this new state-of-the-art elementary school for students from Pre-K to the 8th grade achieves several goals, for the immediate community as well as throughout the state. First, it represents a true commitment to providing quality educational opportunities for children in urban areas. The building itself is equipped with technology features that match, if not surpass, many of those seen in the wealthier school districts in the area. From wireless technology to a hands-on technology curriculum, the building was designed to meet not only today’s computer and technology needs, but also tomorrow’s. The building also represents a strong commitment to incorporating the arts into everyday curriculum. With dedicated classrooms for art, music and a top-quality performance auditorium, the school will provide enhanced arts instruction for its more than 500 elementary school students. The second major goal of this new facility is to provide a strong presence within the neighborhood and serve as an anchor for future neighborhood revitalization efforts. More and more, communities are recognizing the important role that new school construction can play in re-establishing local neighborhoods. This project exemplified this approach. To date, we have already witnessed a housing rehabilitation project that was undertaken by a local community group directly adjacent to the new school. In addition, a new public safety building is being planned by Rutgers University for a site across from another entrance to the school.

2. Why does the project merit the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence? (You may wish to consider such factors as: effect on the urban environment; innovative or unique approaches to any aspect of project development; new and creative approaches to urban issues; design quality.)

The development of the Lord Stirling Community School in New Brunswick epitomizes the essence of the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence. It is a project that has worked on all levels, from its inception as a concept and a plan to its occupancy and use as a new school. There are several aspects of this project that highlight it as a model project. First is the project’s unique development structure. The school was designed and developed by the New Brunswick Development Corporation, a local not-for-profit community development corporation, on behalf of the local school district. By relying on DEVCO as its partner, the Board of Education was able to dedicate its attention to educational matters rather than the issues involved in project development. By entering into a guaranteed maximum price contract with a general contractor, DEVCO effectively shifted the risk of cost overruns from the school district to the contractor. Further, because the project team was able to effectively manage costs, it was able to deliver the new school to the Board of Education on time and under budget. As a result of these savings, the Board of Education was able to purchase important technology hardware and other items to enhance the use of the new school. The second model aspect of this project is its community design features. Early in the design process, the Board of Education determined that it wanted separate and distinct spaces for a cafeteria, a gymnasium, and an auditorium. Often, these spaces are combined into a single multipurpose room, which while appearing to be more efficient, actually reduces the overall usefulness of the space for students and the community. With distinct spaces for each of these areas, as well as a separate media center and computer lab, the school has successfully created features that are truly accessible to the community. Already in its fourth month of occupancy, the district is seeing active use of all areas of the building both by students during school hours and by the community in the evenings and on weekends. Meetings in the cafeteria can be held on the same night as recreational league basketball in the gymnasium as well as a new community theater group that rehearses in the auditorium. The excitement of the building’s community design features are seen not only in the building’s interior, but also in how the building’s exterior was designed. With one side of the building that fronts George Street, New Brunswick’s downtown corridor, and the other sides of the building that front a residential neighborhood, the architects designed the school with two distinct appearances and entrances. The George Street entrance is used primarily for evening or community access to the school and projects a traditional presence within New Brunswick’s downtown. The neighborhood side of the school was designed with a more approachable and friendly appearance with design features such as a curved wall and landscaped areas with grass and trees.
2003
RUDY BRUNER AWARD
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1. How has the project impacted the local community?

The project has had tremendous impact in the local community from the start of its development up through its first four months of occupancy. When it was first suggested that a unique approach be used to develop the school as a redevelopment project, the City incorporated the project into an overall redevelopment plan for the area. The site proposed for the school was uniquely situated along the downtown corridor on one side and within a residential neighborhood on other sides, thus creating the potential for a project that would have a major impact on the surrounding community. Further, while the site itself included some single and multi-family residential properties, it also included some light industrial and abandoned properties that were factors adding to the deterioration of the local neighborhood. The replacement of these inappropriate land uses with a community school was in itself a major benefit. Since that time, revitalization efforts on the surrounding properties have already begun. A local community group undertook a housing rehabilitation project on a site across from one side of the school, and Rutgers University is undertaking the development of a new public safety facility across from the other side along the downtown corridor. The school itself is seeing a high level of use. Parents and students alike are pleased with the school, as evidenced when enrollment demand far exceeded expectations during the district’s open enrollment period. Evening and weekend use of the school have already become the norm, including the advent of a new community-based theater project.

2. Describe the underlying values of the project. What, if any, significant trade-offs were required to implement the project?

While there are so many direct and indirect benefits of this project, the two primary features that factored in during the development of the project were: 1) the development of new state-of-the-art educational facility to help foster quality educational opportunities for children in an urban area and 2) the presence of an anchor to foster future neighborhood revitalization efforts. These benefits were achieved by the unique development structure of having a local not-for-profit development company undertake all aspects of the project, thus relieving the local Board of Education from the burdens of such an effort.

Under this project structure, there have been no apparent trade-offs to the district. It retained control of what it wanted both educationally and structurally, and this was considered every step of the way in the design and development of the project. The only resulting trade-off in the project itself has been balancing the needs of the building’s program with the amount of outside recreation space available to the students. As with any urban project, land is at a premium requiring a creative design for the amount of outside space that can be used for recreation.
3. Describe the key elements of the development process, including community participation where appropriate.

The New Brunswick Board of Education took the first steps of the project during the initial planning phase. A separate Facilities Committee, made up of Board members and local residents oversaw the preparation of educational specifications that determined the school’s intended curriculum and desired features. Discussions among the Board, New Brunswick’s Mayor and City Council and the New Brunswick Development Corporation followed, establishing the framework for the development of the school as a redevelopment project. Under a unique partnership, DEVCO entered into a contract with the Board for the development of a new elementary school. Under this contract, DEVCO acquired the site (originally comprised of 32 separate lots), designed and constructed the school and sold the site and the school to the Board upon completion of the project. As part of this project, DEVCO entered into a contract with a general contractor for the construction of the school at a guaranteed maximum price, thus guaranteeing the overall purchase price of the project to the Board. This is an important distinction from the manner in which public school construction is typically handled. Under the public bidding structure, projects often see hundreds of change orders which can result in serious cost overruns. In this project, the general contractor bid the project much as a private project is bid and absorbed the risk of cost overruns normally born by the school district.

4. Describe the financing of the project. Please include all funding sources and square foot costs where applicable.

The project first was financed under a traditional construction loan vehicle, which was later refinanced through the issuance of temporary redevelopment notes. These notes will be converted to permanent long term debt once the Board receives a determination as to how much State aid will be provided to the project.

A total of $27.8 million in financing from the City was provided for the project. This included the cost to acquire the property, the construction of the new school and the complete furnishing and fit out of the school, including 300 new desktop and laptop computers. The final hard construction cost per square foot for the school was $155, a truly competitive construction figure in an urban setting.

5. Is the project unique and/or does it address significant urban issues? Is the model adaptable to other urban settings?

This project has played an important role in addressing many significant urban issues. From urban school construction to neighborhood revitalization, and from land use to urban design, the project exemplifies the type of creativity and forward thinking that is essential in not just addressing urban issues, but more importantly, in successfully solving those issues.

The model is highly adaptable to other urban settings that possess elements that are required to successfully implement this type of multifaceted project. Many of the tools that were used in this project can be replicated using the various planning, redevelopment and school construction laws that exist in individual states. Using these available tools, a key component to the success of this type of project will be the cooperation that exists between the community’s partners and local leaders, who are willing to forge new ground in the pursuit of the development of new school facilities and in achieving community revitalization. The success of this project depended upon a strong partnership between the Board of Education, the City of New Brunswick, the Mayor, the City Council, the local community, the State Department of Education, the New Brunswick Development Corporation, the project’s architect, general contractor and all the subcontractors. Each of these organizations and the individuals who participated in the project recognized the importance of this project for the students and for the community as a whole. This motivation was seen at every juncture of the project and in the overall spirit of its accomplishment.
2003
RUDY BRUNER AWARD
COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVE
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This sheet is to be filled out by someone who was involved, or represents an organization that was involved, in helping the project respond to neighborhood issues.

Name: C. Roy Epps
Title: President
Organization: Civic League of Greater New Brunswick
Address: 47-49 Throop Avenue
Fax: (732) 247.3646

Telephone: (732) 247.9066 x13
City/State/ZIP: New Brunswick, NJ 08901
E-mail: croyepps@civicleague.com

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1. How did you, or the organization you represent, become involved in this project? What role did you play?

My involvement in the Lord Stirling Community School is on several levels. As president of the Civic League of Greater New Brunswick I serve as a member of the School Facilities Committee of the New Brunswick School District for the Board of Education. I am also a former member of the Board of Education and the board and the superintendent of schools asked me to serve on the facilities committee to participate in their five-year school development plan. Second, I am, since its founding in 1975, a member of the Board of Directors of New Brunswick Tomorrow, an organization established to create community engagement in progress for the city, and for 15 years I had been a member of the board of directors of DEVCO, which in this project married my participation with the Board of Education to DEVCO's work for the school board. Finally, as president of the Civic League I direct a non-profit civil rights organization founded in New Brunswick in 1945 with a long-standing commitment to improvement of New Brunswick by encouraging community engagement and participation. In fact the offices of the Civic League are but a block away from the new school, giving us a special insight into the needs of the community and their fulfillment through the project. So my roles were several: to participate in school planning, to participate in DEVCO board oversight, and to serve as a community watchman for the project.

2. From the community's point of view, what were the major issues concerning this project?

Initially the project issues revolved around location. There was an absolute need to replace the former Lord Stirling School, which was nearly 100 years old, but the actual location was always key question. The other key issue was the design of the school. When we began to plan for the school four years ago the focus was on building a technology-centered educational facility. But technology is advancing so rapidly that in those four years our emphasis shifted from building in hard-wired technology to creating more of a wireless environment. In the long-term I think that is going to serve the school, the students and the community they come from in a better way and make the facility more adaptable to future advances in technology. As we adapted the technology built into the building we had to balance issues of timing – getting the project done on time but with appropriate technology. Then too, we needed to maintain a focus on the dual purposes of the building as a school of course, but also as a community-centered resource, and that required skill in design and execution as well as adherence to the concept of this duality.

3. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? How did your organization participate in making them?

There were not so much tradeoffs as options that were available and had to be weighed and selected. One of the tradeoffs is driven by the school's location. New Brunswick is an old city. When we seek new development or redevelopment we have a finite amount of space – of land – to work within. In this case the land parcel assembled for the school limits the amount of outdoor recreation space and this causes more of the physical education curriculum indoors to take place in the gymnasium. On the other hand, the project built a full-size gymnasium that in fact the Civic League advocated for and insisted that we have a physical plant that would accommodate both a full physical education program and be readily accessible to residents in the neighborhood so that the community can have access to this fine new athletic/recreational facility during non-school hours. That's an example of how the Civic League contributed to development of the school.
4. Has this project made the community a better place to live or work? If so, how?

Yes, the community is a better place because of the Lord Stirling Community School in terms of community access to facilities as well as the fact that we now have the kind of school we need in that neighborhood. Of course we need more throughout the city and plans are going forward to do that. But the school brings an added benefit in that it will be a catalyst for other projects on its perimeter, which means we will attract more resources for neighborhood rehabilitation. We are already seeing plans for development across the street from the school, including new neighborhood retail services — which are needed in that part of New Brunswick. And the community is a better place because the school is now a focal point for resident activity. For example, my organization is already using the community space for meetings, workshops and the like. We’re doing an Internet safety program using the computer lab and parents in the community are very excited about that. Meanwhile, residents are using the gymnasium, and making civic use of the auditorium.

5. Would you change anything about this project or the development process you went through?

I would say not. This was a unique project because of the decision to involve DEVCO. Traditionally, schools are built by the city and the school district, and many times, because of many factors, public buildings are not built in a timely manner. Utilizing DEVCO expedited the construction schedule, assured the facility would come in on time and on budget. I recall the construction of another school when I served on the Board of Education in which we had a staff person oversee the project among many other duties. We had delays; we had to redo certain project elements. In this case, we had a development corporation with experience, knowledge and well defined management processes that kept things on time and on track. Based on the experience we had, the timeliness of completion, the quality of the process and the end result, I would not change anything about the development process. In fact, I would replicate it as we move forward with other school construction and I would recommend it to other cities as a model they can adapt and adopt.
2003
RUDY BRUNER AWARD
PUBLIC AGENCY
PERSPECTIVE
PUBLIC AGENCY PERSPECTIVE

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This sheet is to be filled out by staff representative(s) of public agency(ies) who were directly involved in the financing, design review, or public approvals that affected this project.

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Signature

1. What role did your agency play in the development of this project? Describe any requirements made of this project by your agency (e.g., zoning, public participation, public benefits, impact statements).

In New Jersey certain school districts plan and build schools independent of the municipalities they serve while others, including New Brunswick, fund and build schools through the municipal government. We identified this school as a redevelopment project within a municipal community redevelopment plan drafted by the New Brunswick Department of Planning and Community and Economic Development. The redevelopment plan encompasses a larger area but contains a subset calling for a public school and we developed the entire plan with this school in mind. We put no requirements on the project and made it a permitted use under the area redevelopment plan. The redevelopment process itself requires a number of public hearings, which were held and which incorporated the notion of the school. Beyond that we did not require the Board of Education to convene public hearings. We wanted and designed a flexible process to accommodate educational, community and redevelopment planning and needs.

2. How was this project intended to benefit your city? What trade-offs and compromises were required to implement the project? How did your agency participate in making them?

First, we wanted and needed a new school to replace the existing Lord Stirling School, a structure dating to about 1910 that was out-dated and in all ways outmoded for contemporary public education needs. We wanted a state-of-the-art modern school to serve an urban community in an urban district that would contribute to removing deleterious conditions having a negative impact on the community. Those were the benefits we sought and gained. The school is in a heavily developed neighborhood so the size of the facility is probably less than the educational people wanted and that was a trade-off. Assembling and clearing a site in an older city is more expensive than building on vacant land but this site was the right place in the community. Our site selection process was informal, creative and dynamic. We met with DEVCOS as the developer, with Mayor James Cahill, with City planning staff, with the Board of Education, with people in the community to craft a project that would meet as many needs as possible. It does and that’s what makes it so dynamic.
3. Describe the project's impact on your community. Please be as specific as possible.

Impact is difficult to quantify but in a sense we can. New Brunswick is one of 30 New Jersey school districts targeted for major funding through the State's school construction program. The program is designed to address the educational needs of the 30 poorest districts in the state to equalize statewide educational opportunity. And here we have a school that not only exceeds the state's construction program allowances but also has facilities that are just astonishing for any new school. The science lab and the media room are among the very best that can be had. It is a very attractive building that creates a new gateway to the community and gives the neighborhood a new character. Positive impacts include the fact that the auditorium, gymnasium and cafeteria are being used by many community groups at night and that's what we intended. We wanted a facility that could be available to the community during non-school hours without having to open the entire school. That's why we designed a community entrance on George Street and a regular school entrance on Redmond Street. In fact the City has already held a number of meetings in the larger community spaces on community issues. We believe that school construction should be an opportunity to spur community and neighborhood development so that the school building becomes not only an educational resource but also an integral resource in neighborhood redevelopment and revitalization. The concept now has a name—renovation school zones—and is premised on making this inherently sound connection between building a school and other redevelopment including housing and community retail. We are already seeing further proceeds from the concept. Rutgers University is going to build a public safety building opposite the school and other facilities. We have HOPE VI replacement housing moving forward within three blocks of the school and other investment in the community is percolating. We wanted a development magnet and we have one.

4. Did this project result in new models of public/private partnerships? Are there aspects of this project that would be instructive to agencies like yours in other cities?

In our experience it certainly creates a new model for school construction by utilizing a competent private not-for-profit developer, and it establishes a model for making a school central to redevelopment. It's the first example that we know of to build a school as part of a redevelopment project with the engagement of a private entity. The redevelopment process helped us to be more efficient in contractor selection, eliminated some barriers and instantly became a new model for urban school construction in New Jersey but probably also beyond our state. In fact the State of New Jersey is using this project as a template to do demonstration projects in some of the other 30 targeted districts and we are proud to say that we are the only one of those districts that has actually been able to build a new school in the more than 30 months the state school building program has operated. Others are waiting to untangle red tape and get money flowing. Our public/private development model got a school built and open on time. The key is the partnership between DEVCO, the city and the school district. It is an exportable model that should be instructive to other cities, their school boards and to not-for-profit development organizations comparable to DEVCO. An important aspect of this private development model is that working with DEVCO we built the school on a guaranteed maximum price contract. Every mayor and every school board knows how important a breakthrough it is to shift the risk of cost overruns from the public to a private agent that also assures a partner with sound fiduciary and community responsibility. Boards of education usually are comprised of lay people without a depth of business or construction knowledge. DEVCO's involvement eliminated that kind of concern. The board took a successful design team, married it to the developer and thereby achieved a high level of comfort while being kept fully informed about the project's progress.

5. What do you consider to be the most and least successful aspects of this project?

We built a state-of-the-art public school in a needy urban area, something we haven't seen in other cities in New Jersey lately and probably not in many cities in the nation, and we made that school the focal point of community redevelopment. It is a very successful project and it created a model to unite school and community planning that we intend to use again in New Brunswick. Still another success is that we got a school that exceeds the State's school construction specifications for the 30 "in need" districts. As to least successful, if it is not a perfect project—there is the deficiency of outdoor recreational space—it's in most ways a great success. It has received rave reviews from educators, from the local press—several editorials said the State had lessons to learn from this project in advancing its school building program—and the community is very accepting. Site assemblage was a concern, it always is but here again things went smoothly as we put together some 15 parcels of land including a small apartment unit and several private homes. The homeowners were content to sell so long as they had assurance their home sites would be used for a school. We had to deal with some site environmental issues typical for urban redevelopment but on the whole these were problems to solve not impediments to success.
PUBLIC AGENCY PERSPECTIVE

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This sheet is to be filled out by staff representative(s) of public agency(ies) who were directly involved in the financing, design review, or public approvals that affected this project.

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Signature

1. What role did your agency play in the development of this project? Describe any requirements made of this project by your agency (e.g., zoning, public participation, public benefits, impact statements).

The major role we had as the New Brunswick Board of Education was in developing educational standards in terms of classrooms, school capacity and enrollment, and then in all of the special programs that would be part of the curriculum, working with our own standards and those of the State of New Jersey. In fact all the facility standards developed for the Lord Stirling Community School exceed those of the State’s school construction program in areas like cost per square foot, room sizes, and non-instructional spaces. For example, the state’s standards do not call for a full cafeteria, an auditorium and a gymnasium. They call for a multi-purpose space. Our building has a separate, full sized cafeteria, auditorium and gym. We were able to do more, and showed it can be done, because of the unique private development model. Late in the project we put a new requirement on DEVCO to revise a standard school nurse’s station into a health and dental clinic. It’s open 11 months a year, daily, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. It provides care that the Board of Education pays for utilizing Medicaid, is staffed full-time by a nurse and dental hygienist and provides services by local physicians and dentists. We wanted that not only for the health of the children but also for the health of their learning, and we got it.

2. How was this project intended to benefit your city? What trade-offs and compromises were required to implement the project? How did your agency participate in making them?

First, we needed to build a new school to replace one built about 1910 that was long past its useful life and long past meeting current educational needs. Second, the Board of Education agreed with the City that a school building is and should be an integral part of the community and a community resource with more than one dimension. A further benefit to the city and its taxpayers is that because we used the private development model we are actually getting a larger state reimbursement for construction costs than if we had followed the conventional model, and built the school to the specifications of the State’s school construction program. Because it is a Type 1 New Jersey school district, the municipality — rather than the school district — finances school construction. This entitled us to 52 percent reimbursement for principal and interest on the project, compared to one-third reimbursement under the state program. We not only get a higher reimbursement, we get a better facility as well. That’s a big benefit. From the point of view of the Board of Education that was the trade-off and it was all positive. In a figurative sense, at the end of the day, we — the Board of Education — sort of drove by the project and said, “That’s a really nice school, can we buy it?” Of course, it was built to our specifications, even when we added the health-dental clinic late in the project. But in terms of compromises, from our perspective, there were none. We got the school we wanted.
3. Describe the project’s impact on your community. Please be as specific as possible.

There are several. We have a state-of-the-art school in an urban community, giving students a facility every bit as equal and more of schools in wealthier communities. Then there’s the partnership with the community in having the gymnasium available for community access and in making the auditorium available for community presentations, meetings, plays, and other shows. The last time New Brunswick built a school was 20 years ago. We needed this one, we need to build more and we have established a bright new model to do that, which will have a long-term favorable impact. As noted, we also did it in a way that delivered a higher reimbursement from the State, clearly a favorable fiscal impact for the Board of Education and the City as a whole. Less tangible but clearly a favorable impact is the sense of engagement we saw in the community. The school’s neighbors watched the project develop; kept an eye out for it, and in this way developed an early stake in its success. Lastly, there is the health/dental clinic, which has so many benefits. It gives children from this less affluent neighborhood access to health and dental care they often do not receive. It improves attendance by providing care, and it gives parents more peace of mind knowing that their children are getting care and that the care is improving their attendance and ability to focus on learning. We can treat a toothache and send the child back to class on the same day. This increases the child’s time in school and on task — which is learning.

4. Did this project result in new models of public/private partnerships? Are there aspects of this project that would be instructive to agencies like yours in other cities?

The project is a model in several ways. The development scheme, utilizing DEVCO, establishes a public/private model for school development. The health/dental facility is a model, and the design of a school/community facility is a model for maximizing public investment. As a school administrator I can say this was the easiest construction project I have ever participated in and that’s because of the financing and management. The City sold the bonds, got the money and DEVCO built it. We avoided a lot of red tape in Trenton but were able to maintain the participation we needed in the design, in setting educational standards. The New Jersey Department of Education insisted we go out to bid. We complied with all bidding requirements. But with DEVCO in the mix we had a process that produced just one prime contractor with subcontractors responsible to the prime. Normally we would expect five major contractors and all the problems that entails. Ordinarily we would have needed to bid every aspect of the project. DEVCO managed the bidding with the prime.

All of these models are worthy of examination by other comparable agencies, and comparable here means Boards of Education, and the school districts and municipalities they serve. The overall model shows you can do more with less, manage it better, involve the community, and get a better educational product by bringing in an experienced development partner with the caveat that the development partner should be a not-for-profit because someone motivated by profit has a different incentive from an entity like DEVCO.

5. What do you consider to be the most and least successful aspects of this project?

As to the most successful aspects of the project I would recall an earlier response. The New Brunswick Board of Education got the school it wanted on time and on budget, and got more than it could otherwise have built at a better reimbursement from the State. The great success was the decision to engage DEVCO, bringing to the project its vast practical experience as a developer. DEVCO knows financing, it knows construction, it knows construction trades, and it knows contracting and project management. As school administrators, we have knowledge and experience in these areas but not the depth of knowledge and experience that DEVCO brought to the engagement. From the perspective of the Board of Education, the Lord Stirling Community School is a success story, and there is nothing in its development — from conception to construction to completion — that we regard as anything but a success. The Home News Tribune, our local newspaper, summed it up in an editorial when the school opened. Calling the school “a milestone for New Brunswick” The Home News said, “...after years of running pictures of gorgeous new schools in suburban towns across the county, pictures this paper ran Friday were of a school serving some of the most disadvantaged kids in New Brunswick; now they too have an auditorium, the latest computers and a technology lab.” For school administrators that sums up success.
DEVELOPER PERSPECTIVE

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This sheet is to be filled out by the person who took primary responsibility for project financing or is a representative of the group which did.

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1. What role did your organization play in the development of this project? Describe the scope of involvement.

The New Brunswick Development Corporation served as the developer of the new Lord Stirling Community School, on behalf of the Board of Education and the City of New Brunswick. DEVCO developed the school as a redevelopment project according to the New Jersey Local Housing and Redevelopment Law, the first of its kind in the state. Specifically, DEVCO undertook the role of a traditional private sector developer, acquiring all land necessary for the project, providing relocation assistance for residents, securing the project's financing, contracting with the necessary design and engineering professionals, contracting with a general contractor for a guaranteed maximum price, overseeing all project scheduling and budgeting issues, and delivering a completed school to the district.

2. What trade-offs or compromises were required during the development of the project?

From a development standpoint, there were very few trade-offs or sacrifices that resulted from the structure. To the contrary, the unique partnership with the Board of Education and the City allowed DEVCO to provide for a level of design flexibility that would otherwise be difficult, if not impossible. For example, by entering into a guaranteed maximum price contract with the general contractor, DEVCO was able to shift the cost burden to the private sector and away from the school district. As a result, DEVCO and the Board were able to have greater control over the project budget. In addition, because DEVCO had effectively managed the development budget, it was able to respond to the district's changing needs regarding technology fit out. With computer technology changing daily, it was able to implement such changes as including wireless technology midway through the project, and to shift from using all computer desktops to using some laptops and incorporating the use of wireless laptops. The only trade-off it found in the development of the project was in the overall development of the area site plan. As with most other urban development projects, there are often constraints on available space as well as costs involved in acquiring property. With the decision to maximize the interior program, the amount of space that was available for on-site parking and outside recreation lessened. These issues were creatively managed by accommodating more than 66 percent of the necessary parking, and by creating two playground areas: one for the older children and one for the younger children.

3. How was the project financed? What, if any, innovative means of financing were used?

The development of the public elementary school as a private redevelopment project created unique financing challenges. At the time, the State was in the midst of establishing a new funding system for the construction of urban schools, but delays in the passage of the legislation convinced the Board and the City that it was important to move forward with the project rather than be subject to untold delays. As such, DEVCO established a unique partnership with First Union National Bank for a construction financing vehicle. Structured as a construction loan, DEVCO was able to use its contract with the Board as security for the loan. Once all the land had been acquired, DEVCO and the City desired to refinance the loan at a lower interest rate, and worked together to structure the issuance of short term redevelopment notes by the City. These notes were used to pay off the initial construction loan, and will be converted to permanent debt once the City determines how much State funding will be provided to offset the cost of the project.
DEVELOPER PERSPECTIVE (CONT'D)

4. How did the economic impacts of this project on the community compare with or differ from other projects you have been involved in?

DEVCO has been involved in more than $1 billion worth of new private and public investment in New Brunswick since its founding more than 25 years ago. These projects have ranged from affordable senior and market-rate housing to commercial office space to institutional and governmental space. Given all that activity, the development of the Lord Stirling Community school has been one of its most important projects in recent years. Not only is the inherent purpose of a new school of great importance to the future of any community, but so too is the role that the development of such a facility plays in fostering revitalization of its surrounding community. One of DEVCO's core approaches to redevelopment over the years has been to create synergies between projects and initiatives and use one project's success to generate the ideas and plans for the next project. In that case this project has truly been a model for DEVCO with the opening of the new school has come a resurgence in the surrounding neighborhood. Down the street, new affordable housing is being built as part of the City's HUD-sponsored HOPE VI housing initiative. A new public safety facility for Rutgers University will also be relocated to the area and recently completed housing rehabilitation projects will likely be catalysts for more residential activity. While the overall redevelopment of the downtown has had a true impact in the City's economic health and revitalization over the years, the impact of this particular project seems so significant because it is focused on a distinct neighborhood.

5. What about this project would be instructive to other developers?

In our follow-up conversations with those representatives of the City and school district concerning their views of the benefits to this development structure, they were unanimous in their conclusions that the development of a new school facility as a private project was the preferred approach. Also, as a local not-for-profit developer the Board knew it could rely on the DEVCO's past successes and its continued presence in the community as evidence that it would produce a quality project of pride to the community. During the first months on this project it became apparent that open communication was the single most important aspect in ensuring that the design and program of the school meshed with the needs of the school district. From the valuable engineering suggestions by the general contractor, to design enhancements suggested by the architect, to appropriate site-planning required by the City, to changes in technology design suggested by the Board, DEVCO sought to encourage broad participation among all participants throughout the project.

6. What do you consider to be the most and least successful aspects of this project?

From a redevelopment perspective the most successful aspect of this project is its very presence within the community. It was a unique challenge to locate a school simultaneously along a downtown corridor and within a residential neighborhood. Many communities might not consider such an approach today given the loss in current and future tax ratables one could expect from a commercial site. The location of a school on a "main street" with high visibility can have just the opposite effect, however, by enhancing the desirability of the surrounding community and serving as an anchor for future activities. Five years from now New Brunswick will see a vibrant residential community with improved housing stock for both homeowners and tenants, increased retail opportunities along George Street and most importantly a renewed community spirit that began with the Lord Stirling Community School.
2003
RUDY BRUNER AWARD
PROFESSIONAL CONSULTANT PERSPECTIVE
PROFESSIONAL CONSULTANT PERSPECTIVE

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This sheet is to be filled out by a professional who worked as a consultant on the project, providing design, planning, legal, or other services. Copies may be given to other professionals if desired.

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1. What role did you play in the development of this project?

LJ Technical Systems is an educational consultant with broad project experience not only in New Jersey but also across the nation. We supply schools with science and technology resources that allow them to customize learning and let students learn in a non-traditional setting. Our role was to design a video production studio and a science and technology program and space. We examined the needs of the school district and evaluated the district’s educational goals to develop a science and technology environment suitable to those goals. In doing so we completely changed the focus from an original plan for a traditional shop classroom to one with a technology basis so that students will have hands on learning experience linking academic subjects to their understanding and use of technology. The district concluded the lab would be a focal point that would excite students about science and enable them to apply scientific learning to real world projects. The facilities and programs we developed convey New Jersey’s core curriculum standards in all elementary grade levels with regard to learning about simple machines. We employ manipulatives that let students build and learn about simple machines, while in grades seven and eight, students have the chance to use tools and machinery to fulfill core curriculum requirements in an environment that challenges them to use math, science and literacy learning and knowledge.

2. From your perspective, how was the project intended to benefit the urban environment?

One of the unique things about the lab is that it can service multiple grades. This is intentional because the district wanted to affect the entire range of grade levels. The district wanted to excite students about science and to do that through the use of technology, to give students real world learning experience and to do in a way that is so exciting that it creates an incentive to come to school. So it’s unique in the grade range that it affects. In fact this is the first time we had created this kind of environment and program in a community school affecting multiple grade levels. The lab is designed to meet educational needs by providing the resources to meet the district’s educational goals. To do that we specked out the workstations for power needs, air, water and storage facilities, working closely with DEVCO and the architects. Everything began with this focus on educational goals to design a lab for use by students and the community. Beyond that, it was a benefit for us to work with DEVCO. Often coordination with a school district can be a long process whereas with DEVCO operating the project we got answers promptly and moved ahead with dispatch.

3. Describe the project’s impact on its community. Please be as specific as possible.

The project gives the community a school with the most up-to-date technology-based curriculum for the grade levels it houses and a laboratory classroom designed to facilitate that curriculum. The lab builds in academic support so that, for example, a student who has difficulty with math can utilize software that identifies his or her need for remediation. It’s a dynamic and exciting learning environment that students in urban schools do not always have available like their peers in wealthier school districts. It also puts a facility and makes available technology that the community can use. One example is the weather monitoring station that is part of the lab facility. Students can monitor weather and broadcast it to the community. This connects the community, especially parents, to the learning program. There is also ability to teach the use of technology, for example, how to create websites and computer aided design. Bringing this kind of technology and technological learning into the urban community is vital to equalize educational opportunity, and that’s a major thrust of New Jersey’s current programs to redress the imbalances between most school districts in the state and the 30 districts deemed most in need, which for the most part are urban districts like New Brunswick.
4. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? How did your organization participate in making them?

The largest constraints we had were space and time. How could we optimize the workspace? The school district and DEVCO wanted us to address grades three through eight and that's a large grade and age range to accommodate in one place. So we had to incorporate projects for the kids that would address learning along with software and support for literacy and numeracy with appropriate workstations to accommodate student seating. So we had to compromise, for example, on seating. An eighth grader needs a much larger seat than a third grader. We solved that problem. Then we had to work within the confines of the designed space, and we accomplished that without any sacrifice. We wanted an environment that all students could use as well as staff. If teachers do not know how to use equipment, they can learn from a video in the companion video studio next door. So all of the equipment supports students, staff and the community, which for example can access the video studio to learn video recording.

5. How might this project be instructive to others in your profession?

This lab is designed to serve multiple numbers of students in multiple grades and that makes it pretty unique. So it's really a pioneering pilot program within New Jersey but possibly in the entire country. It makes a highly efficient use of space and design to achieve that. For example, we installed multiple work tables so that the environment can be reconfigured based on activities and grade levels since students at the elementary levels are using different resources from students in the seventh and eighth grades. Another example is that within storage spaces there are a lot of learning resources so children can move them in and out depending on what they are doing and learning. The efficient use of space is instructive, but the larger point is that it was and is possible to design space and a curriculum focused on technology learning across a broad grade sweep.

6. What do you consider to be the most and least successful aspects of this project?

The most successful aspects of this project were in its management. The school district was most helpful and our consultation with them helped expand the original scope of the facility and program from a traditional shop to this very exciting, cutting edge program. The management and coordination that DEVCO brought to the project really helped to move things along at a far faster, surer pace than we have experienced in a lot of other situations. As noted, the efficient use of space was a success. If there is a less successful aspect, I can't readily identify it. From our perspective this is a success story.
2003
RUDY BRUNER AWARD
ARCHITECT
OR DESIGNER
PERSPECTIVE
ARCHITECT OR DESIGNER PERSPECTIVE

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This sheet is to be filled out by a design professional who worked as a consultant on the project, providing design, planning, or other services. Copies may be given to other design professionals if desired.

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Signature:

1. Describe the design concept of this project, including urban design considerations, choice of materials, scale, etc.

There were unique features that came with the agenda for this project. It was going to be a key element in one of the City’s redevelopment zones, we were charged with addressing specific issues. In terms of design it was recognized early on that we would need to deal with a school presence up front relative to its students and another that would be the representation of the school to the community. George Street was identified as the community’s façade for the project and the scale and treatment of that was somewhat more monumental, somewhat more formal to respond to the community. Elevation was designed with that in mind with understanding the building would establish some precedent with regard to future development on George Street. The exterior materials were selected for compatibility with a church directly across the street and we were able to come up with materials that were very sympathetic and compatible with the materials of the church. The redevelopment zone we were looking at is in fact the George Street corridor going east from the center of town with the Lord Stirling Community School being the far anchor of that corridor.

2. Describe the most important social and programmatic functions of the design.

From a community perspective the major assembly space, the auditorium, and the gymnasium are important pieces. It was anticipated from the beginning that this facility would be a key piece of the downtown and cultural landscape by providing meeting and presentation facilities and also supporting local athletic programs. In terms of the educational programmatic functions and requirements we have what in many regards is a fairly traditional educational program with a number of classrooms, but the building is somewhat more robust in terms of support facilities. Again, both the gymnasium and the auditorium are important support elements, with a generously sized and well lit cafeteria to support meals and other functions, a fairly open office environment that is located in proximity to the school entrance to provide control and security at that point and then a very nice assortment of other instructional spaces including science and art facilities, a state-of-the-art technology lab, support spaces that work in conjunction with the auditorium including a set shop and a costume shop.
ARCHITECT OR DESIGNER PERSPECTIVE (CONT'D)

3. Describe the major challenges of designing this project and any design trade-offs or compromises required to complete the project.

The challenges are not atypical for schools. One significant issue was land assembly but DEVCO had that on their plate and did a good job dealing with those issues. The scale issue in particular with the rear side of the sight fronting a residential neighborhood, meant a lot of attention was paid to disguising the size fronting a residential neighborhood; a lot of attention was paid to disguising the size of the building. From the rear a good portion of the building is below grade so you don’t really sense the size of some of these spaces and so we kept it very friendly with regard to the residential neighborhood. Schedule was certainly a challenge in this case. We had a unique delivery process, with DEVCO essentially acting as the design builder. We were already engaged by the Board of Education and had developed the programmatic requirements for the project in conjunction with the Board. DEVCO took that, brought us on board, brought on the construction manager at risk and built a good team and working relationship that allowed us to respond very well to schedule constraints as well as budget constraints. The budget was the other element that was a challenge here. This was a very successful project in that regard. We all did a great job in managing costs. The role of the construction manager early in the process helped validate our budgets — and then periodically provided monitoring and help with evaluating alternatives relative to value engineering to maintain quality, keep what was important about the school and still maintain as tight a budget as possible.

4. Describe the way in which the project relates to its urban context.

We’ve noted the exterior materials and the scale. The other important thing to note is that within the governmental management context of New Brunswick there is a long history of the various government entities working closely together. The Board of Education works hand-in-hand with the City and this project is a great example of how this kind of teamwork works to everyone’s advantage. DEVCO was brought in to lead this project. DEVCO saw how this fit into the mission of the City as defined by the mayor and embraced it and worked closely with the Board of Education to put together a good design team and everyone responded to that need and vision. Our firm has a lot of experience with urban schools, both in New Jersey and other states. In an urban setting there typically are site constraints. We don’t normally find sites that are as large as everyone would like and that raises constraints with regard certainly to parking and outdoor recreational and play areas. So many times it’s a challenge to come up with a building configuration that efficiently uses the site. In terms of planning the school in construction, an urban site typically doesn’t allow a lot of room for staging areas. Many times as was the case here, we have to deal with old utility infrastructure, sites that aren’t environmentally clean and there are challenges you deal with along the way. Certainly there is more awareness of what’s going on close to an urban project than you might find in a more suburban location. When you talked to the people who were involved with the construction they had some sense that not only were the surrounding residents interested but that they were supportive and many times kind of watching out for the project when no one else was around — they kind of kept an eye on things.

5. Describe the strengths and weaknesses of the project’s design and architecture.

From a design perspective the design was driven very much by the dual approach with a public or civic entrance at the front of the building and a school/students entrance at the rear. Having those two points of entrance really suggested an organization that was driven by an enhanced corridor that connects the front to the rear of the building. That became the key organizing element and we were able to use that to drive the rest of the design, the various spaces around that, and it also introduced some of the more interesting design features. Although through the course of value engineering we had to limit ourselves somewhat, we were able to create some openings between the upper and lower levels of the school. One of the unique features in the design are some low walls and some clearly playful, curving walls that we introduced in order to provide a buffer between the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten and some of the older students. If there were some negatives the site constraints did impose a bit on us. We had to internalize some spaces. We didn’t have as many opportunities as we would have liked to open all the spaces in the interior. We had to maintain a certain amount of mass, and again there were limited opportunities to create outdoor areas as part of the project. This was a truly unique project. The advantages included a higher degree of management control, and DEVCO’s recognition of where the strengths were on the project team, allowing us to take the lead during the design phase and then defer to the construction manager’s expertise during construction. All issues tended to be dealt with in a timely fashion and I guess you could say we were dealing with people who speak our language. DEVCO relied on the expertise of others as appropriate and it was a benefit not to be dealing with multiple prime contractors. I know the Board of Education was very pleased with that aspect. At the end of the day the entire project was delivered to the Board and certainly from the perspective of the final product what was produced is much better integrated than is often the case when things are delivered piecemeal. It’s significant, if we look at the project as a model, that we had local involvement, starting with the mayor’s office and working all the way through the project team and that we knew when it was important to engage the school district and when the district needed to be engaged so that we didn’t drag the district through a lot of mundane details. The process was very responsive and efficient in that regard and shows what can be accomplished if you develop and manage a project at the local level.
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Signature

1. What role did you play in the development of this project?

New Jersey Education Law Center is an advocacy organization representing the students in New Brunswick and other urban school districts throughout New Jersey in the landmark Abbott case requiring the provision of a thorough and efficient education. As a result of that case, a court order was issued in 1998 requiring that the State fully fund all facility improvements in New Brunswick and other Abbott districts. As an organization, we are committed to ensuring that the order is implemented effectively. So, we were involved in the very early stages of the Lord Stirling Community School — not so much in the actual planning and design of the school, but in working with representatives from the Governor's office, the Legislature, and the State Department of Education to get them on board with the concept of a redevelopment organization like DEVCO managing school rehabilitation and construction projects. At that point in time, we had a court order but no implementing legislation. We were committed to making sure that State-financed construction and rehabilitation be not only educationally adequate, but also serve the needs of the community. The Education Law Center paved the way for DEVCO to proceed with the project by getting the State to allow for this unique way to build a school. We supported DEVCO and its vision to create a school to meet the educational needs of the children and the community as a whole. It is the first school construction project to be completed since the 1998 court order was issued. There are many more projects to follow. Our interest in supporting DEVCO was to create a model by which other urban school districts and neighborhoods could see with their own eyes how to do this. We wanted to create a concrete model for the other 430 schools in need of replacement or renovation in New Jersey, a project to spark imagination and what's possible when a school district works directly with the community.

2. Describe the impact that this project has had on the your community. Please be as specific as possible.

In the past, school districts had to go for local financing approval, and therefore would usually only proceed with one project at a time, even though several, or all, of the schools in a district were in need of improvement or replacement. Since the 1998 court order, the State of New Jersey has implemented a school construction financing law, appropriating $6 billion to fund reconstruction. Because DEVCO paved the way as an outside developer of an urban school through the Lord Stirling project, the expertise is now there for Abbott districts to take on this enormous task.
3. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? Did you participate in making them?

The Education Law Center did not take part in the day-to-day details of the school construction, so this question does not really pertain to our involvement. We were more involved in the global issues of getting the State to sign off on allowing a redevelopment organization like DEVCO to proceed with the project, and to ensuring that DEVCO remained committed to building a community school. Our role was to provide encouragement and support in the initial stages of the development. We wanted a “best practice” case to come out of this, one that would work around the state to show what can be done.

4. What do you consider to be the most and least successful aspects of this project?

I really don’t see any downside to this project. It is, however, exemplary in two key areas as far as best-practices are reflected: one, the intense effort to engage the local residents in planning and design, and two, the willingness of the Board of Education and DEVCO to consider community input and how that was reflected in the final design. Specifically, the additional facilities in the building, like the effort to add dental and medical facilities, a gymnasium, and the theatre. That’s the real success story here.