

New Jersey Architects Inspire Students Through Mentoring Program

By [Mel Fabrikant](#) Monday, July 27 2009, 03:52 PM EDT

ACE Program Seeking to Expand in New Jersey

The highly successful ACE (architecture, construction and engineering) Mentor Program of America, in which building industry professionals, including members of the New Jersey chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA-NJ), serve as mentors for high school students seeking careers in the building industry, is seeking to expand in New Jersey.



The ACE program is seeking design and construction professionals to be mentors for the program, which now serves approximately 100 students in eight teams throughout the state, said Diana Eidenshink, manager of affiliates for the national organization. The program is seeking to double the number of participants.

"The program has been a huge success in New Jersey, thanks to the generosity of our volunteer mentors, cooperating businesses and participating schools and colleges," Eidenshink said. "We want to expand the program to accommodate the growing demand from students who are interested in careers in the building industry."

The mission of the ACE program is to enlighten and increase awareness of high school students to career opportunities in architecture, construction and engineering and related areas of the design and construction industry through mentoring, and to provide scholarship opportunities.

Industry professionals volunteer to become mentors in order to introduce high school students to their professions.

Teams comprised of five to 25 students and their mentors are organized like an actual design team, with students being guided through a mock design project. Mentors provide direction as the students work toward a final project, introducing them to the careers, industry vocabulary and various roles that companies play in the construction industry.

An example is Cumberland County, where four representatives of the architectural firm of Manders Merighi Portadin Farrell in Vineland recently served as ACE mentors for 12 students from five area high schools. The students worked with their mentors on a program of activities ranging from construction site tours to learning sessions with industry experts.

In addition, the team worked on a project that simulated a "real-life" situation. The mentors typically select either proposed building projects or projects that respond to community planning proposals.

This year, the Cumberland County students and their mentors met at least twice a month at Cumberland County College in Vineland to design an on-campus residence for visiting faculty. Last year, the students worked on a project that examined the impact of a new motor sports park in Millville, N.J.

The students recently presented their unique designs for the faculty residences to ACE participants from other parts of the state, as well as parents and mentors, in formal year-end presentations held at Rowan University's College of Engineering in Glassboro, N.J. A similar program was held in northern New Jersey.

The leader and coordinator for the program in Cumberland County is Larry Merighi, AIA, principal and partner of Manders Merighi Portadin Farrell Architects in Vineland. The other mentors were George Bongiorno, Steven Graham and David Manders, AIA, who are also with Manders Merighi Portadin Farrell.

Merighi became involved in the ACE program five years ago after participating in a number of "career days" at local high schools, where he spoke with students with an interest in architecture. Through the ACE program, he has since worked with more than 75 students, at least 30 percent of whom are pursuing careers in architecture or engineering.

"I realized that one hour of my time was not enough," he said. "I wanted to really spend time showing these kids what a career in architecture or engineering could mean. Whether or not they select careers in the building industry, their participation will make them more informed consumers with a deeper understanding of the built environment."

In addition, the program awards scholarships to students pursuing careers in the building industry. At the Rowan event, Vineland High School senior Robert Carpenter received a \$5,000 scholarship from Hill International, a management and construction firm based in Marlton, N.J. He will pursue an electrical and computer engineering degree at Rowan. Three other students received \$500 scholarships.

"The program instills confidence, helping students figure out what they want to do with their lives and shaping their careers from the outset," said Merighi. "Mentoring is a great way to help them find their voices so that they can one day make their marks in the world."

Students and building industry professionals who are interested in participating in the ACE program should contact Diana Eidenshink at 203-323-0020. Alternatively, they may register on the Web site at www.acementor.org.

About AIA and AIA New Jersey

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) is the professional organization that helps architects serve the public's needs and builds awareness of the role of architects and architecture in American society. The organization, which was founded in 1857, recently celebrated its 150th anniversary. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., its 300 plus local chapters represent 86,000 licensed architects and associated professionals. AIA New Jersey, based in Trenton, is the local chapter of AIA. In 2000, it celebrated its 100th anniversary. AIA New Jersey has about 2,000 members in six regional sections. For more information, please visit www.aia-nj.org.

About the Ace Mentor Program

The mission of the ACE Mentor Program of America is to enlighten and increase the awareness of high school students to career opportunities in architecture, construction and engineering and related areas of the design and construction industry through mentoring; and to provide scholarship opportunities for students in an inclusive manner reflective of the diverse school population. ACE is a unique partnership among industry professionals -- architects, interior designers, engineers, construction managers, college and university representatives, and other professionals from related corporations and professional organizations -- who work together to attract young people to their professions. For more information, please visit www.acementor.org.

PHOTO CAPTION: Cumberland County ACE Mentor program participants with mentor Larry Merighi, AIA (left), of Manders Merighi Portadin Farrell Architects in Vineland, N.J.