

Children Discover Ancient Cultures in Unique Day-Care Center

MAPEI Products Follow the Sun



At the exact moment of the summer solstice on June 21, 2004 (2:11 p.m. local time), the sun shone through the skylight in a new “kiva” in Farmington, New Mexico. Where the sun struck the floor, a mosaic tile medallion was installed using MAPEI mortars and grouts. In addition to commemorating the longest day of the year in the Four Corners area of the southwestern United States, the medallion also signaled the opening of San Juan Regional Medical Center’s new Children’s Discovery Place.

Mike Wells, of ROFDW Architects in Dallas, [BHI] a specialist in facilities for children, followed the requests of SJRMC to design a building appropriate for their region with respect for the cultural environment. He interpreted ancient construction techniques into the plans for the day-care center. The kiva, representative of American Natives’ ceremonial community room, is round with a stone façade reminiscent of pueblo cultures around the Chaco Canyon area 1,000 years ago. The kiva will be used primarily for children’s activities.



Care centers and classrooms are arranged in an arc that spins away from the kiva. The youngest children’s rooms are located closest to the kiva, while older youngsters play and study in classrooms further away. The interior was built hacienda style, with rooms surrounding a courtyard in the center of the building. Each classroom has its own bathroom, and all rooms have direct access to the play-yard. The interior walls are painted in soothing, light adobe hues.

To avoid an institutional look inside the center, the construction team incorporated a mixture of floor-covering styles and materials. Southwestern patterned carpet tiles in rich, soft textures and colors were incorporated in public spaces and in the kiva to lower noise levels. Bright primary colors were scattered among the neutral tones of the vinyl composition tiles covering the floors in the classrooms. Decorative mosaic tiles were installed in all 12 of the children's



the summer solstice was also designed with mosaic tile. Carpet One Plus, a flooring retailer who also subcontracts on large commercial jobs, did the installations. When he viewed the final work, architect Mike Wells said, "It was one of the best tile jobs I've seen in years. The mosaic tiles around the curved fireplace were especially well-set."

To be sure the floor coverings in the day-care center could withstand the tests of time and children, the Carpet One Plus installers used total solutions from MAPEI. First, they prepared all the floor surfaces with *Planipatch*[®] patching compound. The workers then used environmentally friendly *Ultrabond ECO*[™] 710 to install 7,200 square feet of vinyl composition tile in the classrooms, and *Ultrabond ECO* 575 for the cove base. *Type 1*[™] mastic was used to cement the wall tiles, and *Ultracontact*[™] mortar was used with the floor tiles. *Keracolor*[™] S grout in warm gray and the matching *Keracaulk*[™] S caulk filled the spaces between the tiles. "We've always used MAPEI products and have been very satisfied with them," says James Telford, installation manager for Carpet One Plus.

Green building tenets were employed in several aspects of the center. Understanding that daylighting plays an important role in children's health, Mike Wells oriented windows so that minimal electrical lighting is needed. Fluorescent light is positioned to bounce upward, increasing its illumination. Other sustainable

design features include the use of stucco on exterior walls, xeriscaping, low-flow nozzles for irrigating, wood framing and concrete foundations. Child safety also played a role in the room construction. A stripe of magnetic paint covers a 4' x 6" area in each classroom, so the children can hang their drawings and paintings with refrigerator magnets instead of pushpins.

San Juan Regional Medical Center (SJRMC) planned the day-care center as a personal benefit for hospital employees, volunteers, physicians and physicians' staff members. The building, located a half block east of the hospital, offers childcare from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. seven days a week. These hours provide the much-needed extra coverage for employees who work 12-hour shifts. The age range of the children attending the center – from three-week-old infants to kindergarteners – is a distinctive feature of the program. There are plans to offer a School's Out Camp for older children in the summer of 2005.

Bright Horizons Family Solutions was selected to manage the Children's Discovery Place. Their mission "to partner with employers to support their employees as they strive to balance the demands of work and family" is what attracted SJRMC to them initially. Beth Childs, director of Human Resources for the medical center, explained, "Bright Horizons uses an emergent curriculum. Whatever the children are experiencing becomes part of the day's lesson. For example, if there is a thunderstorm outside, it is incorporated into a lesson about weather." She added, "We are selecting the caregivers from our local population. The community college has an early childhood development program, and they will serve as a primary source of teachers for Children's Discovery Place."

James Telford was especially excited about working on this project for San Juan Regional Medical Center. "Carpet One Plus feels the Children's Discovery Place is a high-profile project for our community," he said. "The day-care center will support hospital growth in our area by supporting the hospital's employees."

Larry Smith, SJRMC Director of Facilities and Engineering, and the project manager overseeing construction of Children's Discovery Place, gave the entire project the highest praise. "The general contractor needs to be commended as well as our architect. We were able to bring the project in ahead of schedule and on budget. There was great teamwork, and we were able to utilize local craftsmen." He added one last thought, perhaps the most important of all, "It's a fun place – there's nothing like it!"