

Safe, Stress-free Environment Splashes Hope across a Chicago Community

Joan Kroc, wife of McDonald's founder Ray Kroc, knew how important it can be for children to get the right start in life. No one wins a gold medal in cycling, swimming, running or any other Olympic sport without a chance to first learn about their talents in the local community. Every musician or artist needs the opportunity to discover and hone his or her talent in the neighborhood before achieving international fame. Mrs. Kroc recognized that she had the means to help those future stars get their start in a safe, stress-free, encouraging environment. Believing strongly in the excellent stewardship of the Salvation Army, she left them nearly two billion dollars in her will to build and maintain community centers in under-served neighborhoods across America.

Wherever a community center was built, the members of that community were challenged to provide part of the funds to ensure their commitment to perpetually sustain the center. The Salvation Army accepted the challenge and assumed the stewardship of the money that would help make dreams come true. To date, 18 Ray and Joan Kroc Corps Community Centers have been built in communities from San Diego, California, to Guyama, Puerto Rico., Seven more centers will be brought to life by the Salvation Army by the time Joan Kroc's vision is complete. The largest project to date has come to life on Chicago's South Side.

People in the West Pullman area of South Chicago had been more used to losing out than winning. "The area was in tough shape, as once middle-class neighborhoods were filling up with families turned out of public housing. Gangs waged turf battles; drugs and gun violence were a constant threat," reported Jay Pridmore in an article for *Chicago Magazine* (January 2010). When the Salvation Army settled on West Pullman as the location for the Chicago community center, residents began to see new hope for their neighborhood. Even gang members saw the positive impact the center could make for their younger brothers and sisters.

Though West Pullman had not been the original choice for the site, the Salvation Army decided it was the perfect location for their directive to bring hope to an area without hope and strength to a community whose people felt the weakness and stress of poverty. Here they found 33 acres of city-owned property on which to develop 160,000 square feet of baseball fields, basketball courts, a gym and fitness center, a theater, music rooms and a fantastic 14,000-square foot enclosed water park featuring entertainment and relaxation pools as well as a lap pool to perfect the skills of competitive swimmers.

When the Salvation Army first began planning for a Kroc Corps Community Center in Chicago, they wanted to honor Joan Kroc's desire to make an architectural statement with the buildings as a way of valuing the members of the community. An international competition resulted in the original employment of Murphy/Jahn Architects of Chicago to develop the drawings for the site, resulting in a stellar design of glass and steel. However, the recession hit Chicago as hard as it did all parts of the U.S. between initial concepts and the time to begin construction. Local fundraising had slowed, and the Salvation Army's stalwart decision to hold to its \$60 million construction budget led to the Murphy/Jahn group withdrawing from the project, citing an inability to maintain the scope of their original plans for that price.

The Salvation Army turned to a local Chicago architectural firm, Antunovich Associates. Joe Antunovich retained much of the light, uplifting elements of the Jahn design, though in a more restrained design that allowed construction to fit within the budget. Included in the design was a large glass wall that brought the inside and outside of the aquatic center together in spacious harmony.

Part of the reason Antunovich was selected was due to his good working relationship with W. O'Neill, who served as the general contractor for the project. Coming in on budget still meant doing the job right and doing it well, especially the aquatic center at the heart of the project.

Trostrud Tile & Mosaics was selected to install the tile in the pools and relaxation areas of the aquatic center. The core of this structure is its infinity-edge construction that spills water from one pool into another. To be sure that all parts of the pool were true, Trostrud used a green laser (to help them sight the lines better) and floated mud walls, something seldom done by tile installation companies today. To make all the curved surfaces in the leisure pool, Trostrud had a millwork shop make them 14 custom radial templates for pulling the wall mud. MAPEI surface preparation products *Topcem Premix* (an accelerated-cure screed mortar), *Planicrete AC* (an admixture for mortars and concrete used in the mud beds) and *Mapecem Quickpatch* (a concrete patch) were used in this part of the work.

All tile work was done with MAPEI products, which Trostrud uses for their reliability and durability. Though work began in the spring of 2010, the pool tiles were installed from March to June of 2012. Depth markers for the pool were sourced from Inlays, Inc. All 2" x 2" tiles for the pool were supplied by Daltile in two colors - D-617 Arctic White and D-023 Galaxy (blue). For the first month of the tile work, the Trostrud crews used the *Kerabond/Keralastic* mortar system to set the pool tiles and *Keracolor S* to grout the joints. When the project came within 35 days of filling the pools, there was a growing need for speed. So the installers switched to MAPEI's *Granirapid* fast-setting mortar system and fast-drying *Ultracolor Plus* grout. In all, 13,029 square feet of the 2" x 2" tile and trim was used, and 1015 pieces of 5" x 10" DSA-Handhold tiles were set into the pool.

The aquatic center has been one of the biggest hits of the Salvation Army's Ray and Joan Kroc Community Center of West Pullman since the day it opened in June 2012. "We enjoyed doing the work," said Brad Trostrud, "and it felt really great to be a part of this project that will bring a safe, stress-free place for kids and adults alike to meet and grow into a strong part of our city's future."