



Project of the Year Feature – Community Partner – A Special Mention Honor

January 16, 2024

BURR RIDGE – For the second time ever, the CISCO Board decided to use its discretionary authority and award a Special Mention honor, which resulted in CISCO's 7th and final Project of the Year Feature – [Walsh Academy & Career Tech High School](#), also known as Walsh Academy, which is recognized with the Community Project honor. This project was unique, and the Board felt it deserved to be recognized in some way. General contractor was [Wight Construction](#); client was [Maryville](#).

When considering submissions, judging criteria is based on: quality of construction, design, impact on the community and safety record.



The building had to be completely gutted. Multiple classrooms and offices, and the adaptation of several ground- and first-floor elevators to accommodate shop classes with modifications to permit small engines and equipment to be transferred to and from the second floor. An elevator within the building provides accessibility throughout the building. All new mechanical systems also were installed.

Architects

The Maryville Jen School was founded in 2007 as a non-public special education school that caters to students with special education needs living on the Maryville Des Plaines campus. Since 2007, Jen School has strived to meet the ever-changing needs of its students and the communities in which they live.

The school provides an individualized and comprehensive educational program designed to help students achieve their academic, social-emotional and vocational/career goals using a

project base/hand-on. Its inclusive philosophy focuses on providing students with the support they need to reach their full potential. The Jen philosophy of dignity, compassion, integrity and respect is interwoven in all that it does.

Students attending Jen School, now the Charles H. Sr. Academy & Career Tech High School, (Walsh Academy) have one or more significant challenges, such as specific learning and emotional disabilities, Autism or other health impairments, which negatively impact their ability to learn in traditional settings with traditional instructional models. In addition, many of these students have experiences of childhood trauma such as neglect, abuse, abandonment and homelessness.



New driveway entrance for Walsh Academy

The Maryville Academy is a non-profit, which educates students with special needs. It purchased the property at 6935 W. Touhy Ave., in Niles (formerly South School), and converted the building to a high school. It broke ground on Walsh Academy Nov. 9, 2022. The academy is named after the late Chuck Walsh, an alum of Maryville Academy, who also served as a member of its Board of Directors for several years. The Academy opened Nov. 27, 2023. With Maryville's purchase of the Niles South School in Niles, Walsh Academy is elevating its vision to meet the future needs of students and the demands in the workforce. The building was renovated to become the first non-public special education school in Illinois, and possibly the

only in the nation – to focus its Career Technical Education (CTE) training on a skilled trade curriculum for special education students.

With this move, Walsh Academy is progressing from CTE courses, which simply make learning more accessible, to providing Trade focused CTE courses, which create pathways for more than 100 students to pursue Apprenticeships and high-paying, high-demand careers in various skilled Trades.



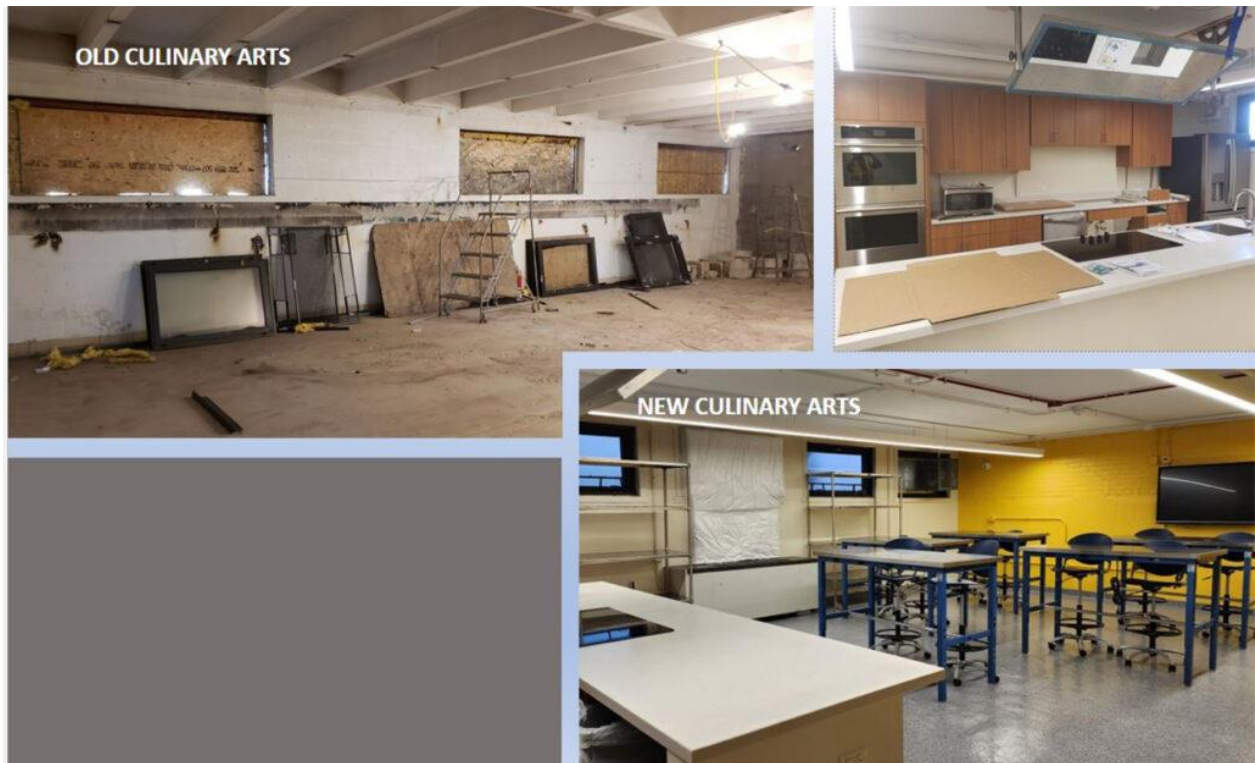
Exterior of building

The existing structure is situated on a parcel of approximately 108,000-square feet. The structure is three levels, with the lower (basement) level having an area of about 20,000-square feet. The first floor has an area of about 21,000-square feet, while the second floor has an area of approximately 17,000-square feet – for a total structure area of about 58,000 square feet.

The school had to be completely gutted – from roof to foundation. There wasn't a single square inch that wasn't touched by renovation. Upon 1st tour of the building, there was mold, debris, and vandalism EVERYWHERE.

The Walsh Academy will provide students with individualized CTE programming in the following industries:

- Construction – including home construction and repair and building tiny homes for veterans
- Small Engine/Bicycle Repair
- Graphics



Culinary arts

Additionally, other new facilities at the Walsh Academy include:

- Metals Lab
- Podcast Studio
- Medical/ Health Lab
- Culinary Lab Garden/Greenhouse
- Driver's Education
- Screen Printing/Printshop
- HVAC
- Plumbing
- Electrical

Walsh Academy is working on developing a three-way partnership with contractors and Union organizations who are helping develop course curricula and providing recommendations on the facilities and equipment needed to prepare students for success in Apprenticeships, additional technical training or higher education and on-the-job.

Several ground and first-floor classrooms were created to accommodate shop classes with modifications to permit small engines, and have equipment be transferred to and from the exterior. A new elevator within the building will provide accessibility throughout the building.

All new mechanicals systems were installed. Exterior site improvements included building out the entrance, new driveway, garbage enclosure and landscaping. Security features were also installed, including: cameras, lighting, windows and doors. There is not an area in the 60,000-square foot building that was not touched.



Old Gym



New Gym

New Spaces Include/Enhancements:

- 12 total academic classrooms (4 more than previously site)
- 8 designated vocational classrooms
- Multipurpose room
- Gym
- Stage
- Staff work room
- Two social work conference rooms
- Additional administrative office
- Updated bathroom facilities
- Water bottle filling stations

Old Classroom



New Classroom

Significant features:

- Large classrooms
- Designated spaces for trade classrooms
- Natural lighting
- State of the Art technology
- Space

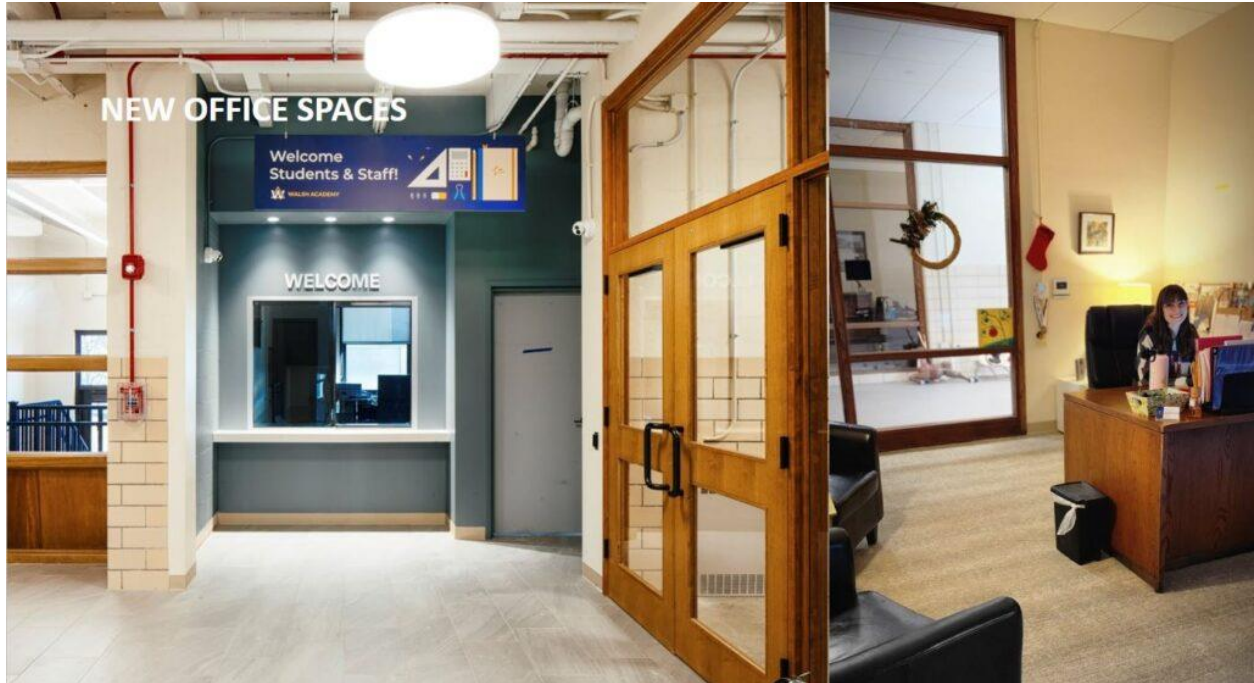
Over the 12-month construction period, there were only two minor safety incidents. Wight Construction held weekly job safety meetings and had their own internal Risk and Safety audits. Students taking CTE courses will receive up to 120 hours of instruction per semester. Graduates will receive an Illinois High School diploma with curriculum that is validated by the Illinois' State Board of Education and be awarded certificates for each CTE program they complete. Research by Stanley Black and Decker released in 2022 indicates individuals with careers in the Trades are satisfied with their choice and would recommend their career to others.



However, misperceptions about the Trades and lack of exposure prevent today's youth from pursuing these careers. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics 2022, There are currently 8 million vacant jobs in important skilled Trade positions in the U.S. This indicates a need to expose students to careers in the Trades during their formative years.

The new Walsh Academy will create more opportunities for special needs students while helping them reach their fullest potential. It is the only school in Illinois that has a teacher, social worker and paraprofessional in the classroom. In November, they welcomed students from more than 30 high schools and 18 school districts in northern Illinois. It will operate as a non-public special education day school with no religious affiliation.

Not only will Walsh Academy be impacting the lives of students for generations to come by providing a hands-on experience and training in the Trades, it impacts the local community by hiring additional employees for Walsh Academy. There also is an economic impact of Walsh Academy employees living and working in the local communities from which students are served.



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