

Di Cara | Rubino Architects takes “green” to a new level

New Discovery Classroom at River Edge’s Cherry Hill Elementary School is off the grid

Di Cara | Rubino Architects takes its responsibility of “green architecture” seriously. In response to today’s issues involving alternatives to fossil fuels for power and reducing our carbon foot prints, Firm Principal Joseph A. Di Cara, AIA has created a design for a Discovery Classroom that not only meets today’s sustainability goals, but also raises awareness of global warming issues for students by integrating the systems into the classroom to enhance the district’s earth science curriculum.

The new Discovery Classroom at Cherry Hill School is based upon the award-winning Discovery Room at Roosevelt School, also designed by Mr. Di Cara. This new Discovery Classroom has been designed and constructed to be completely self-sufficient through the use of photovoltaic cells, a renewable energy system. While the classroom is still “connected” to the school, the solar energy that it harnesses is distributed back into the grid, resulting in an educational space that technically stands alone and remains carbon neutral. Additionally, the eco-conscious classroom features environmentally friendly finishes including paint with low VOC content and carpet and ceiling tiles manufactured from recycled materials.

The room is designed to foster hands-on science learning. Computer stations monitor the solar panels and are integrated into the classroom to allow students to see for themselves the give and take of the power distribution. Mr. Di Cara knows that this room can be part of the solution to today’s climate crisis. Mr. Di Cara states, “It makes me very proud as an architect to not only do my part by designing spaces that are respectful of our environment, but to also create educational spaces that combine energy conservation and climate awareness for our future generations. By learning about this now, they are the ones who will integrate this into their lives and have an even greater role in protecting our planet.”

The Discovery Classroom is part of a \$12 million addition and alterations project at both district elementary schools. The overall project includes the 3-story New Bridge Center addition to Cherry Hill School which houses new kindergarten classrooms to accommodate an expanded learning day, a new program for autistic students, and dedicated classrooms for visual and performing arts. At Cherry Hill School, the media center and art room were expanded, a science lab was created in the former kindergarten classroom, a new multi-purpose room was constructed, and the previous multi-purpose room was renovated into music classrooms. Finally, at Roosevelt School, several classrooms and the media center were renovated and an elevator was installed to make the building handicap accessible.



Joseph A. Di Cara, AIA is the Principal of Di Cara | Rubino Architects, located in Wayne, NJ.

He has been a resident of River Edge for over 20 years and his son attended River Edge Schools.

Mr. Di Cara is a nationally recognized and award-winning designer specializing in educational facilities.

He is a member of the American Institute of Architects, NCARB, and the Architects’ League of Northern New Jersey.

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