

COMMUNITY

Building Sustainable Community Centers

NewsUSA

(NU) - Urban sprawl doesn't have to mean ugly stretches of gray roads and discount retailers – many formerly rural communities take steps to develop sustainably.

Western Pennsylvania's Peters Township used to be farmland. As more people moved into the area, the Chamber of Commerce worked to preserve the neighborhood's friendly, rural feel. Peters Township set aside parks, public areas, playgrounds, fishing, an outdoor stage, sports fields, picnic tables and a walking trail for its 21,000 residents.

But when the township decided to build a large recreation center, it encountered a problem – how could it construct a large building that wouldn't clash with the look of nearby parks and neighborhoods?

To build a low-maintenance, inexpensive and durable community center with eye appeal, the township turned to concrete masonry.

Concrete masonry can be made to look like natural materials, from stucco to brick to antique stone, so it can fit in with surrounding buildings. The material proves more affordable than stone or brick, and durable enough to withstand even hurricane-strength winds.

Even in areas that don't see many natural disasters, concrete masonry shows longer wear. Unlike wood, which can warp with age, become moist enough to foster mold growth or become termite fodder, concrete masonry resists moisture and insect



Planned community centers face unique issues – they must be affordable, weather-resistant and durable.

infestations.

Concrete masonry also promotes indoor-air health. Concrete walls don't require painting, limiting people's exposure to paint-based chemicals. In many areas, concrete walls regulate temperature without needing extra insulation, which can increase costs and hold allergy-inducing dust.

Communities looking to build green community centers often turn to concrete masonry. When community organizers built the George L. Stevens Center, a senior living facility in San Diego, eco-friendly construction was a top priority. Concrete masonry contains recycled materials and reduces energy costs, allowing for Earth-friendly buildings that can withstand heavy use and the test of time.

For more information about community buildings, visit www.ncma.org.