



AIA
Virginia

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Young Virginia Architects Tackle Richmond's Food Desert

RICHMOND, VA Dec. 9, 2016— A group of architects just starting their careers and architecture students focused on the 41,000 people in Richmond who do not have access to grocers carrying healthy, fresh foods. What they do have access to are convenience stores often stocked with chips, sodas, alcohol and beef jerky.

Wait a minute. What are architects doing involving themselves in food issues? Don't architects design buildings? "Yes architects design buildings — and it takes problem solving skills to make sure those buildings enhance people's lives and communities," says Brian J. Frickie, AIA, President of Kerns Group Architects in Falls Church and leader of the ELA Steering Committee. "By focusing on the lack of affordable, nutritious food in areas wracked with poverty, members of this group of young leaders are honing their abilities to seek creative solutions and apply their skills in an area of public service that is as important now as it will be to future generations. In short, they are gaining experience in facilitating changes in communities."

This class focused on three existing food programs in the city with an eye toward connecting them and expanding their reach to city residents.

Shalom Farms has its farm growing fresh fruits and vegetables in Goochland — too far away from people in the food desert — so the group found a lot in Richmond's Sherwood Park area and Shalom planted a good sized garden there. "This is a place that many people who are too far away from food stores can access — often by walking," says Virginia Beach-based Cox Kliwer & Company, P.C. Architecture Intern Chris Warren. "Here an urban farm can grow awareness as well as vegetables and teach gardening to volunteers. This went well and we hope the plan can expand to more space in the area. Shalom is already fundraising to make real growth a reality."

Church Hill Activities and Tutoring — CHAT — is working on a café which can be a gathering place where healthy recipes can be shared, mentoring and tutoring can take place. CHAT's Nehemiah Workshop students learning carpentry and design will help with construction and the café can provide meals with fresh produce.

Working with the Richmond City Health District's Healthy Corner Store Initiative, the architects created display shelves to showcase fresh, healthy fruits and vegetables and help them stand out in the noise of branded, processed foods. They built the display, then tested it at the Davis Market near VCU.

While the Emerging Leaders Class is a one-year program, this group's master plan will continue in the three programs with the CHAT café expected to open next year. Some of the architects also plan to continue their involvement.

Emerging Leaders in Architecture is an honors academy of AIA Virginia. Started in 2009, its goal is to develop future leaders in architecture firms, the profession and in communities. The annual program consists of seven day-long seminars on topics including financial management, presentation and communication skills, negotiating techniques, legal and ethical issues and public service. A class project based in the real world is a mainstay of the program. There are now more than 125 alumni from this program. More information can be found at <https://www.aiava.org/professional-development/emerging-professionals/emerging-leaders-in-architecture/>.

About AIA Virginia

AIA Virginia is a society of the American Institute of Architects and represents nearly 2,500 architects throughout Virginia. Founded by five architects in 1914, AIA Virginia has represented the professional interests of architects and allied professionals in the Commonwealth of Virginia for more than 100 years. For more information, contact AIA Virginia at [\(804\) 644-3041](tel:8046443041) or visit www.aiava.org.

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