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American Institute of Architects/Boston Society of Architects Tour brings int'l. attention to changing face of Providence

June 05, 2008 - Front Section

On May 14th, Providence got a facelift, at least in the eyes of an international group of architects. One of a multitude of tours highlighting New England architecture offered by the Boston Society of Architects (BSA) and the AIA in honor of the AIA's 2008 convention, "Catch the Acela to the 'New' Providence" offered visiting architects an insider's view of the city, the changes it has seen and where it is heading.

Traditionally seen as a city of "red brick," the group of twenty-six attendees met with Leslie Gardner, chair of the Capital Center Commission, and Deborah Melino-Wender, executive director of the Capital Center Commission to discuss the renaissance taking place within the city. Illustrating their point, much of the presentation took place within the GTECH Center, the district's first new modern, mixed-use office building to be built in nearly twenty years, hosted by GTECH Corp. and designed by Spagnolo Gisness & Associates, Inc.

Attendees then strolled the short distance across Waterplace Park for another glimpse at the abundance of redevelopment and urban infill taking place within Providence. Nick Iselin, director of development and construction with Intercontinental Real Estate Corp., discussed the Waterplace luxury condominium development and Blue Cross's new headquarters currently under construction along the waterway.

Afterwards, the tour shifted focus, offering visitors a chance to see a balanced view of the urban revival at work within the city. Clarke Schoettle, a member of the DOWNCITY Design Review Commission and Providence Preservation Revolving Fund, joined Glen Fontecchio, architect and chair of the Providence Historic District Commission, as well as Chris Ise, city of Providence planner and DOWNCITY Design Review Commission staff member, to discuss the state of the city's historic structures along Westminster Street. During his presentation Schoettle emphasized his belief that the city's historic buildings should be preserved at least until development is ensured to avoid the proliferation of vacant lots when planned development falls through.

Attendees finally ended the day with a look at the Rhode Island School of Design's new award-winning library, led by Carol Terry, and Brown University's profusion of redevelopment highlighted by Michael McCormick.

"All organizations visited from GTECH to Brown University were great hosts. Of particular interest was the presentation given by the Capital Center Commission of Providence as well as by [Intercontinental Real Estate]," said tour attendee, Vito Aquafredda of CSR Construction Corporation in New Jersey.

Additional BSA and AIA tours were planned throughout New England from May 14-17th with other architecturally-related events throughout Boston.