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Biomass facility design earns American Institute of Architects Honor Award for Architecture

Summary: The design reflects its purpose as a new energy research and demonstration facility.

(December 2, 2009)-HGA Architects and Engineers (HGA) has won an American Institute of Architects (AIA) Honor Award for Architecture for the design of the Biomass Research and Demonstration Facility at the University of Minnesota, Morris.

“This project completely embodied its function,” said the award jurors. “The energy plant is a simple, thoughtful piece of architecture with incredible details. We just loved it.”

The new biomass plant was created as an addition to the existing campus energy plant. The designers complemented the original plant while “establishing [the biomass facility’s] own aesthetic vocabulary, symbolically highlighting the difference between traditional energy sources and new energy sources.”

“Because this is both an energy plant and a demonstration facility in renewable-energy resources, we created an architecture of transparency, in which much of the mechanical infrastructure is visible through metal screening and wood slats,” noted project designer Steven Dwyer, AIA, of HGA. “The facility will meet approximately 80 percent of the campus demand for heat, using up to 9,000 tons of corn stover each year for fuel.”

“The University of Minnesota, Morris is pleased that the AIA has recognized the architecture of the Morris biomass facility,” said Lowell Rasmussen, Morris campus vice chancellor for finance and facilities. “First and foremost, we want the plant to be a research and demonstration facility, but for it to be recognized for design is an achievement as well.”

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