

Jim Mueller, KMD Architects
State of the Juvenile Facilities Market

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Mueller

For much of the past 28 years, architect James Mueller has designed various types of correctional facilities for the San Franciscobased KMD Architects. While Mueller can often be found working in the San Francisco office, he actually makes his home in Bend, Oregon, commuting to and from the City by the Bay, or to KMD's Portland or Seattle offices. As Chairman of the Board and Director of the firm's Justice/ Corrections sector, there is plenty for him to take pride in—particularly as the corrections industry has gravitated toward taking mental health concerns into the design of buildings. But perhaps no sector is more important to the chairman than the recent work the company has done in the Juvenile Justice sector—helping to create juvenile facilities that are more than just lock-ups for angry kids, and that also include both educational and counseling components. The design of Juvenile Facilities is one where Mueller says he sees real hope for troubled youth—so much so that KMD offers a scholarship competition for incarcerated youth at one facility. Correctional News sat down with Mueller recently in San Francisco and got brought up to speed on this evolving sector.

Q: *Jim, let's start by talking a little bit about KMD's juvenile justice sector and some recent projects — the one in Fresno and the one in San Mateo.*

Mueller: In the middle 90s, later part of the 1980s, the state of California had a grant system that was developed to assist counties throughout the state in the planning and development of juvenile facilities that was of new construction, renovation, etc. All counties took advantage of that, and so there was really comprehensive revitalization of the juvenile environment within the state of California. We were very fortunate to participate in that and probably did more facilities throughout the state than any other architect within the state of California. I think we did about 16 county facilities. We did nearly all of the largest of all those facilities. The three largest were

Ventura County, Fresno County, and San Mateo County. They all did brand new, comprehensive youth services campuses and we were fortunate to be selected for all of those.

Fresno was unique in that it approached the development of their facilities with a comprehensive youth services environment. So they had a detention component, they had a commitment component, they had a courts component, receiving homes, work release centers, community schools, planned into their master plan. What they ended up building were the detention and commitment components and then the court component. In what they built, the commitment component was sort of a very interesting and unique aspect, because it was one of the first ones done in the state. And these were adjudicated juveniles that were low-risk that had formerly been sent to the state. The county decided [on this] for two reasons: it was not economically viable to send their juveniles that were low-risk juveniles back to the state because it was too expensive based on the scale, the reverse sliding scale that the state utilized in terms of the counties paying them to incarcerate their kids.

Q: *When you say “state” you mean the Youth Authority?*

Mueller: It would have been the California Youth Authority at the time. And of course people were aware that, at the time, the CYA suffered from a pretty miserable reputation nationwide in terms of how they were housing incarcerated juveniles. So there is that aspect of it. That was the other motivating aspect for the county, because the county said, ‘We don’t want to send our juveniles to that type of an environment. We can do better at home.’ So for economic reasons, and for philosophical management reasons, they decided to build the [civil] commitment component. There are other reasons for that. It keeps the kids closer to their families so you can have family interaction and that sort of thing. And you know that when a juvenile is going to be released he is going to immediately go back to his community. Ninety percent do. So it will keep them in the community, keep them in the cultural environment that they are used to, develop their skill-sets. And then, when they come back into the community, it is more likely they will be productive.

So they built those. Then, this was at the same time that the state was consolidating the court system throughout the state of California. And it just happened to coincide. Their facility development coincided with that transition in the state. So they were one of the first ones that then negotiated an arrangement with the state to assist in funding of the development and construction costs for the court component.

The difficulty with it was that the county had introduced into the planning with the court the integration of other support services for the court, which was probation, district attorney, public defender. They were planned into a single facility, along with the court. And the state was prepared to fund only the court and those aspects of the construction or planning that directly support the functioning of the court. So you had the court administrator, you had the court clerks, but probation and district attorney weren’t part of that equation. Since they had been integrated into a single building, there was some difficulty pulling that apart from a financial, funding aspect. And so we had to design it so that it was separately metered for the county portion versus the state portion. That took time but they finally arranged for that and they finally built the court. There was about a delay of a year between the time they initiated that negotiation and the time they completed it.

So they did then build the court and so that sort of completed at least the commitment and detention and justice side of the master plan. But it was, to the best of our knowledge, the first standalone court of any type - juvenile or adult - in the state of California funded through the [Administrative Office of the Courts] new consolidation funding program. So it was rather unique in that aspect too. We had to do a little bit of replanning and redesign to satisfy the AOC's planning and design standards, which we had not been obliged to adhere to in the original development of it. So it was a bit of a re-planning process but it was pretty small.

Q: *Is it normal that you would have to do redesign or re-planning at all in any given project?*

Mueller: Not really. It will depend on who the stakeholders are. Traditionally, these communities develop a planning committee when they decide to develop a facility, so they bring all the known important stakeholders to the equation to participate in the planning and design of their facility. So, usually we have input from all of those stakeholders as we develop the plan.

Now, occasionally there will be a change – in, for instance, the probation department - in the middle of the planning. That will occasionally occur. So one of, if not the major, stakeholder may change its personality due to a turnover of the staff or something like that, and that will cause us to do some re-planning because each one of those entities has their own management philosophy. It's usually expressed in the details of the planning, not as a consequence of a total change in management philosophy. It's usually how you execute a strategic management philosophy, and people will have differences of opinion about that. The most difficult part of what we do is actually acting as a mediator between all the stakeholders.

You have, of course, the county administrative office who is worried about dollars and how their dollars are being spent, because that office is beholden to the county commissioners, and the county commissioners are a public entity that serves a community and wants to utilize public dollars in the most efficient way. So the county administrative office is worried about dollars. The county facilities folks are worried about physical maintenance, the maintenance of the facility. How do we produce a facility that is easily maintained over time? That's where they want to spend their money, to make their life as easy as possible. Then you have, of course, the user groups, who want to develop a facility that's a comprehensive facility, which is not always consistent with the county administrative office who wants to utilize their dollars. If you have a court component, you have the judiciary involved and the judiciary has its own needs. Balancing that equation out and concluding a facility that probably not everyone is absolutely delighted with but everyone is totally satisfied with because it has met the needs of everybody, which requires compromise on the part of all the entities, is our biggest challenge.

Q: *Let me step away a little bit. We talked a little bit earlier about the San Mateo juvenile facility. Could you describe for me what San Mateo was doing with their juveniles before the project was completed three years ago, and then describe a little bit about the project now and why it's so innovative?*

Mueller: Sure. They had a very, very old facility on a piece of community or county-owned property. The facility was dysfunctional in terms of its planning, given the type of youth the counties are dealing with now. Before, these facilities were usually operated and planned to be like community homes or foster homes, because the level of risks of the juveniles was not as

high as it is today. I mean, this facility was 30, 40 or 50 years old. So it was not planned in anticipation of the needs of the community as they currently exist because you have a higher level of violence, you have gangs, you have drug and alcohol abuse, you have psychological problems — a lot of difficulties that really didn't exist when they designed their original facility.

But they had tried to developed programs that responded to the needs of youth, but they were just doing it within a facility that didn't support that. And part of our job is to plan and design facilities that reinforce the management program from an architectural perspective. And the types of space you produce, the relationships between the components that you generate in the planning, all can enhance the execution of the programs that the facility is supposed to provide. So we use evidence-based design, which finds its origins really in the healthcare planning and development facility. That's got to do with the type of space, natural light, use of the outdoors, color, acoustical control. All those things have been proven evidentiary that they enhance concentration; they enhance the productivity and development of the human psyche, the emotional side of the equation, in the facilities that utilize those principles. We've been one of the first ones that really started applying evidence-based design principles in these kinds of facilities to enhance and support program development.

San Mateo County was extremely unusual. They developed a master plan that replicated in many ways Fresno County's master plan. Two things that San Mateo did, however, was they built their entire program over about a five year period. The other thing, they were unusual because under the grant funding mechanism developed by the state, the state really was looking for additional detention beds within these facilities. It was essentially a criterion for funding. Now, San Mateo County somehow managed to get by that and said, 'we really don't expect to have to increase our bed capacity. In fact, because we are creating a comprehensive youth services campus, we are looking to alternative methods of dealing with juveniles and diverting them out of the criminal justice system.'

It's been proven for years that the deeper a juvenile moves into the juvenile justice system, the more likely he is to re-offend as an adult. So developing alternative and diversionary programs was the philosophy that the county used, because they felt that using that kind of management philosophy, they would actually divert kids out of detention and corrections and move them productively back into the community and thereby reduce bed need. So that's what they did. So they built not only detention capability, they developed a commitment capability, which housed low-risk adjudicated juveniles for up to a year, 18 months. They had a court there, but they also had a comprehensive series of standalone youth service facilities spread throughout the campus. That included a girl's home for at-risk girls. Now, these are juvenile girls who have not entered the criminal justice system but are at high risk and likely to violate.

Q: *A social worker referred them, perhaps?*

Mueller: That is correct. And so, they move into that. That is a six-month program and the idea is to divert them out of the justice system back into the community at a reduced risk. It is a tremendous program. It's actually been featured in Correctional News as a Facility of the Month. It was given a citation for special excellence in planning and design by the AIA, in their annual justice facilities review. It's a tremendous program. I've had an opportunity to go down there and spend lunch with the girls there a couple of times, and they are a terrific group of kids. Very demanding. They give you no leeway. They're smart and they're tough but they are just tremendous kids.

They also developed a community school on the campus, a receiving home, group homes. They have a work release program. The group home deals with dual-diagnosis juveniles: juveniles who suffer from mental health problems as well as substance abuse problems. It's a very unusual program. Very successful. If you look at statistics governing youth at risk, and especially youth within the justice system, you are going to find that somewhere in the vicinity of 65 percent of juveniles in the system suffer from some form of drug abuse and mental health problems and require really a treatment environment as opposed to an incarceration environment. And I think that is where the juvenile community has been special within the criminal justice system in recognizing that and developing programs that address that.

Q: *This is a trend?*

Mueller: It is a trend you are seeing in the adult system now. You are seeing it in the adult system for different reasons. In the juvenile system, I think they inherently understood the relationship between drug and alcohol abuse, mental health problems, and the risk level of juveniles moving into the criminal justice system. So they were very early recognizers of that trend and started to develop these treatment and commitment components within their facilities to deal with that. So they were unusual that way. They also were one of the first ones to really look at keeping juveniles within their community, as opposed to sending them away to distant facilities, because of the cultural integration aspects of it. The ability to keep those juveniles in touch with their families and maintain those relationships. The ability to develop family programs, adult and parent programs to assist adults in acclimating to the at-risk juveniles that they are parents of. That's starting to move into the adult system a little bit but I think for different reasons.

So the juvenile environment was an environment that we were delighted to participate in because of all the criminal justice work that we do, it is the area where we feel we can contribute most to improving the criminal justice system.

Q: *Back to the juveniles for a second. Tell me a little bit, on the personal level, about what the last 28 years of your life has been, around getting involved in the juvenile part. What does it mean to you?*

Mueller: I think we all start out as architects when we graduate from college thinking that we can make a difference in the quality of life of our community by improving the physical environment we all live in. And I think we all committed to that on a philosophical, moral, esthetic basis young people coming out of an architectural educational environment. I think we continue to aspire to that as we develop through our careers but there are business aspects to what we do. There are other aspects to what we do and perhaps there are not always the opportunity, given your client base, to really do those things you aspire to as a younger person. In the justice community, there are two areas where we feel that we can really respond to that challenge and achieve some of those aspirations we had as younger people. One is in the juvenile environment. It is an area where we can affect people's lives in a very direct way. All of the work that we do throughout our disciplines in our office aspires to do that and address that challenge in all the work that we do. But there are very few environments where you can actually see a result in real terms. Yes, we are sure that the people who enter our buildings enjoy our buildings, but do they do they walk

home with their lives changed? Probably not. Hopefully they are happier, but how do you prove that?

In the juvenile environment, there is evidence. You see juveniles graduate out of these systems as better people, both in terms of their own self-respect, but also in terms of their ability to integrate into a community in a productive way.

We've had the recent pleasure of being invited to sponsor a scholarship program at one of our juvenile correctional facilities. It is a facility that is owned by the state of Colorado. It is run by a private operator by the name of Rights of Passage. It's a 500-bed facility that is a staff-secured facility. It has no electronic security. It has no locks on the doors. It is a peer pressure environment. It is run on the honor system. Juveniles are given an opportunity to participate in this program on a voluntary basis once they've been evaluated and qualified for it. If they create a problem within the facility, they know the alternative is a tougher place. So it's run on the honor system. It's been extremely successful. I think 30 percent or 40 percent of the graduates of that program move on to higher education. So we were invited to sponsor a scholarship and we did that this year.

Q: *What does the scholarship entail?*

Mueller: It is a commitment of dollars to assist tuition, housing, books, supporting the juvenile through financial support through the year. It's a one year commitment, renewable after each year. So I will have the pleasure of presenting that scholarship to the selected student on March 5.

Q: *To steer the conversation a little bit in a different direction to the justice sector in general, what are your, RFPs like this year? It's not much into this year, but what do you anticipate 2011 versus 2010, 2009?*

Mueller: Actually, last year there was not a scarcity of RFPs, frankly, in our experience nationwide. The difficulty is that it's become a very much more competitive environment because architects and planners and designers that have had work in other arenas have no work there so they are moving to obviously the arena that has opportunity associated with it. So we see a lot more competition. Where the response to certain RFPs you might have seen eight, ten, 12 responders, you [now] see 25 and 30.

For instance, the AOC's program for the courts system in the state of California. There were 42 projects put out in the sequence of three solicitations, each having ten, 15 courts in them. And I think on the first round of 15 they got somewhere in the vicinity of 500 responses. They had to develop three separate teams to review all the responses and pare it down to finally a short list of three, four, five, for each one of the facilities. In terms of next year solicitations, we see a lot of opportunity coming up in the next year. Really, the end of last year and the beginning of this year and through the balance of this year, there are a lot of solicitations we expect to see. They are coming out in areas of opportunity that are especially suited to our skill sets, interestingly enough. Most of it is in the state of California. There is a lot of focus in the state of California because the Department of Corrections here, as you may know, has been under a federal receivership for the provision of health care services within the system. They are under a special master supervision on the mental health side and under a special master on the juvenile side. So they are under federal scrutiny and have been for a long time. With the receivership, the

receiver, they are under a court order to correct the provision of health care services throughout the system. So they are under a federal court order, and they are obliged under that court order to build facilities that will satisfy the health care needs and mental health needs, as well as dental needs, within the constraints as established by the court. If they don't do that, they are effectively in contravention of federal court.

Q: *Final question: How's the fishing in Bend?*

Mueller: Because of my work schedule I don't have much opportunity to participate in that, so I've had a limited amount of time for that.



The San Mateo Youth Services Center, which includes the county's Juvenile Hall, offers Education, Food and Health, and Mental Health Services to at-risk and incarcerated youth.