

ULI Chicago 9th Annual Vision Awards
July 11, 2024



Project Finalist: North Austin Center | Chicago Neighborhood Initiative (CNI)

Project Team:

Developer/Owner: Chicago Neighborhood Initiative (CNI Group)

Architecture Firm: Present Future Architects

General Contractor: ARCO/Murray

Project Description: The North Austin Center is a \$40.1 million, first-of-its-kind, professional-level indoor and outdoor complex for sports, education, and wellness. Constructed across 10 acres and 150,000+ square feet, this project transformed a vacant parcel of land on North Laramie in Chicago's North Austin neighborhood to ensure families have access to team sports, education, enrichment, and wraparound services that help form the foundation of a strong, healthy, and safe community. ARCO/Murray completed the project in partnership with GMA Construction Group, By The Hand Club For Kids, Grace & Peace Revive Center, Intentional Sports, Chicago Fire Foundation, and Jason and Vedrana Heyward (formerly of the Chicago Cubs). The project was supported with a \$1.5 million capital grant from the State of Illinois, which assisted with the Brownfields Redevelopment of the former Glidden paint factory. The grant provided critical resources that enabled community leaders to break ground. The campus is anchored by three 501(C)3 nonprofit organizations and serves an average of 60,000 youth and 12,000 adults annually and provides more than 100 hours each week for community members to participate in sports, classes, and other activities. The ongoing development of the project prioritized the needs of the end users, including By the Hand Club for Kids, Intentional Sports, and Grace & Peace. This project encountered numerous challenges, primarily arising in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic-induced material shortages led to increased costs and therefore financial overages before construction. Delays in shipping and receiving further escalated these issues. To overcome these obstacles, the project underwent rework and design updates, enabling an early start to construction even in the harsh winter conditions of Chicago. ARCO/Murray's project team made a collective effort to prioritize local minority subcontractors and owners when awarding \$9.5 million of the overall construction work. This commitment to the community's welfare resulted in more than 200 temporary jobs. As construction progressed, unforeseen obstacles surfaced, including remnants and environmental hazards from the historical Glidden paint factory that occupied the site until 1935. Foundations, tunnels, tanks, and conveyor belts were discovered underground, concealed by additional layers of earth and greenery. The remnants were carefully taken out, treated, and properly disposed. The facility has since created 40 full and part-time jobs for local community members, with an estimated 105+ permanent jobs at full capacity. About 25% of community members in a 1-mile radius of the facility have an annual income of \$25,000, with 49% of these families having children in poverty. Facility partners and sponsors joined forces to introduce groundbreaking programs and services, bringing unprecedented offerings to the community. The North Austin Center is home to Chicago's largest and only FIFA-regulation indoor turf arena with weekly soccer training by the Chicago Fire FC Foundation, supporting professional and community use. The facility also offers The Chicago Fire P.L.A.Y.S. Program, Intentional Sports Youth Academies, community-based sports activities, Grace & Peace Revive Center wraparound services (including a weekly food pantry), By The Hand Club For Kids after-school programming, and various drop-in activities.