



# PILLARS

LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM

**2023-2024 REVIEW**





## 2024 PILLARS CLASS

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## ABOUT PILLARS

The Pillars Leadership Training Program of the American Institute of Architects Kansas City prepares a representative cross section of the chapter's emerging leaders and individuals from the building community for their role in shaping the future of both the architectural profession and the greater Kansas City metropolitan area. The training program includes active participation in programs and exposure to community leaders and issues. Each class spends their time exploring core issues that affect our profession and the region within which we practice. Through discussions with leaders and colleagues, dialogue among themselves, tours and research the group will be able to understand and present to the AIA as a whole how we can make a positive change within our community. The AIA Kansas City Pillars program is a nationally recognized program for its originality and depth and has inspired similar AIA leadership studies in other US cities. The program continues to raise the bar of what young professionals want out of their profession and how we as professionals can make an impact on our built environment.



*Panelists discuss local sports development issues*



*Construction tour at the CPKC Stadium for the Kansas City Current*

## OCTOBER: SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

In October, Pillars explored Sports and Entertainment in Kansas City through the lens of current and future development. The session kicked off with an engaging panel discussion at JE Dunn Headquarters, near the potential East Village site for the Kansas City Royals. Joe Perry, Vice President of Real Estate at Port KC, Jim Rowland, Executive Director of the Jackson County Sports Complex Authority, Dan Lolli, Chief Operating Officer at Sporting Kansas City, and Thomas Friestad, Staff Writer at the Kansas City Business Journal shared their insights and expertise with the group. We explored the spirit and culture of our community as it relates to local sports and how that has incentivized national and international events such as the NFL Draft and FIFA world cup, and the future of Kansas City as a sports destination. We discussed the interconnected nature of major professional sports teams and their respective venues in Kansas City as it relates to economics and their role as entertainment and community assets.

Pillars got to see this development in action at the new CPKC Stadium for the Kansas City Current at Berkley Riverfront. Andrea Mulvaney and Kaitlyn DePenning from Henderson Engineers led a hard hat tour of the stadium and discussed design and construction considerations. From player and fan spaces, to press boxes and private suites, to the pitch itself, creating spaces for the community to engage with the team and for the stadium to serve as an active anchor along the

riverfront were key considerations in the design. The stadium also offers incredible views of the Christopher S Bond Bridge and towards the downtown skyline.

Transitioning from a focus on professional sports to recreation, Pillars visited the original Chicken N Pickle in North Kansas City. Kellen Mumm, Director of Business Development (and CNP's first employee), described the growth of the sports restaurant concept and pickleball in general across the KC Metro and the country. We learned about the initial idea, the popularity and accessibility of the sport to a range of skill levels, navigating new markets, and its impact on communities as an anchor tenant. During happy hour, Pillars had an opportunity to try their hand in some friendly competition on the court.



*Pillars enjoy a game at Chicken N Pickle*





*Visiting The Merc Co-Op in KCK*



*The story of Yolli Tortilleria*



*Volunteering at Kanbe's Market*

## NOVEMBER: FOOD AND BEVERAGE

In November, Pillars explored the impact and influence of Food and Beverage in Kansas City. The session started at the Kansas City Kansas Chamber of Commerce. Rebekah Bryer, Senior Manager of Partnership & Engagement with 'Visit Kansas City Kansas' shared the story of the KCK Taco Trail initiative, an interactive app that showcases 60+ locally owned taco shops in the KCK region. The Taco Trail has sparked national attention and put Kansas City Kansas on the map as a food destination, benefitting both the local business owners and the Kansas City community as a whole.

Next up, the group took a quick walk over to The Merc Co-Op to meet with their Marketing Director, Laura Marsh. This community-owned grocery store in KCK is located in a previously identified food desert and has had significant impacts on the community by providing healthy, locally-sourced groceries in addition to education and resources about food.

From Kansas City, Kansas to the Westside, the Pillars got a glimpse into the history of Yolli Tortilleria, a locally-owned tortilla bakery and recipient of a 2023 James Beard Foundation Award. Marissa Gencarelli, Co-Owner of Yolli Tortilleria, gave everyone a tortilla sample to munch on while sharing the Yolli journey - from working with a marketing agency to curate a meaningful story with the Yolli brand from its inception, to prioritizing the highest quality ingredients in

their goods, along with ethical wages and opportunities for their employees.

After Yoli, the group headed to Kanbe's Market. Casey Claps, Director of External Affairs, explained how Kanbe's Market is eliminating food insecurity by providing fresh, affordable produce in over 50 corner stores throughout the city. The group was then able to assist the organization by sorting boxes of produce before they were shipped out for distribution.

The group finished up the day with some beverages at Casual Animal Brewery and Border Brewery. From talking with respective brewery owners Lara Gray and Eric Martens, the group learned about the history and growth of breweries in the Crossroads district and how these breweries have had an impact on development in the urban core of the city.



*Enjoying beverages with Lara Gray, Co-Owner of Casual Animal Brewery*





*Panelists discuss homelessness in the metropolitan area*



*Touring the Hope Faith overnight winter shelter*

## DECEMBER: GOVERNMENT & SOCIAL

In December, Pillars explored the many components of homelessness in the Kansas City metropolitan area. We started the session with a panel discussion with Mark Miller, the Executive Vice President of Behavioral Health at Swope Health Services; Terry Claudell, the President of Eden Village; Rob Santel, the Director of Programs at Cross-Lines Community Outreach; and Josh Henges, the City of Kansas City, Missouri's Homeless Prevention Coordinator. We learned that homelessness is a solvable problem. It starts with providing more affordable housing, but it is not always an economic problem. People can become homeless and people can remain homeless, and the people who remain homeless often need more than just economic support. They need access to wrap-around services that support their health and behavioral health needs. This is one of the reasons Eden Village has been successful. They provide the chronically homeless a safe place to live in a sustainable and supportive community environment, so they can focus on building a life outside of homelessness.

Next, Pillars met Emily Reeves, the Overnight Shelter Director at Hope Faith. She gave us a tour of their facility in the historic northeast where they provide basic necessities to the homeless, including showers, meals, and other essential services. During the winter, Hope Faith is an overnight winter shelter to those in need during the cold winter months. It is open for 90 days, but they have a broader goal to be open 365 days because everyone deserves a safe place to sleep.

Finally, Pillars volunteered at Operation Breakthrough's Christmas warehouse. Operation Breakthrough is a non-for-profit that responded to the need for quality child care and provided a nurturing and safe environment for children in poverty. They offer a wide variety of educational programs, and during this time of year, the Christmas program. Many of their donors will provide extra gifts and toys, so the week before Christmas, Operation Breakthrough allows families in the area that are not a part of other Christmas programs to pick out gifts at their Christmas warehouse. Since this had already happened, we packed up leftover toys, so they could be sent to their permanent storage facility. Throughout the year, they will grab gifts and toys from their storage facility for their birthday closet.



*Volunteering at Operation Breakthrough's Christmas warehouse*



*Xander Winkel tour and discussion of the Culinary Center*



*Overview of the 12th Street Post with Kaylie Trusler and Austin Mosier*

## JANUARY 2024 : INNOVATION + SMALL BUSINESS

In January, Pillars focused on the importance and impact small businesses & entrepreneurs have on Kansas City. We started at the Green Hills Branch of the Mid-Continent Public Library. Our first presenter was Chante Keller with KCSOURCELINK. We learned that 58% of all jobs in Kansas City are the result of small businesses and Entrepreneurs. She provided an extensive overview of what resources are available to anyone in our community to start, grow and succeed in business, the impact COVID had on the local business “ecosystem”, and how the KCSOURCELINK network is unique to Kansas City and is being mimicked in other cities across the country. While at the library, we met with Xander Winkel to tour the Culinary Center within the library that provides information, guidance, and rentable commercial kitchen space to startup food businesses. They also provide culinary literacy courses and seminars to the public to help people maintain a healthy lifestyle. We also discussed how these types of additions to public facilities provide a betterment to the community as a whole.

Next, we traveled to MADE MOBB to talk with Vu Radley & Jesse Phouangphet about how this small business grew into a Kansas City staple streetwear brand with national recognition. They spoke about their struggles to get started, the business learning curve, and the impact COVID had on their market. They recognized the influence of social media for their product, stating that about 60% of their orders were

straight-to-consumer purchases. Lastly, they make their retail space accessible for community events, social outreach, and other local events.

For our final stop, we traveled into the West Bottoms and toured the 12th Street Post, a shared retail hub for several small local businesses. We got to tour each of the small businesses, listen to their stories of success, issues with landlords and traditional retail spaces, and how this space gave them the ability to establish roots, and scale accordingly to the market. We talked about some of the businesses reach across the country and how Kansas City is prime for new innovation and commerce.



*Vu Radley & Jesse Phouangphet giving the origin story of MADE MOBB*





*Enjoying the view on the patio at McCownGordon Construction*



*Pillars taking the streetcar between session stops.*

## FEBRUARY: PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

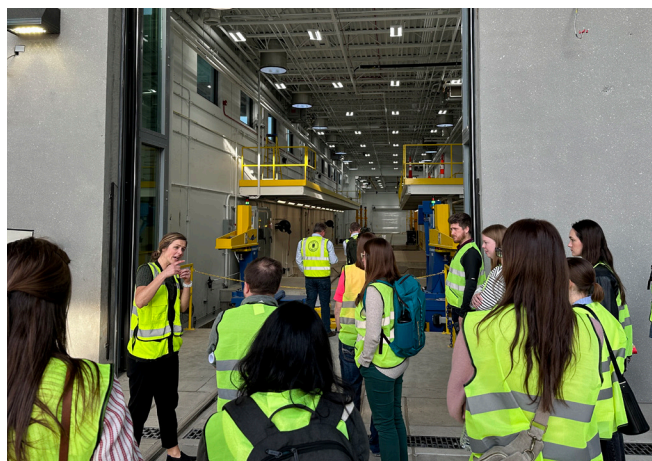
In the February session, the Pillars learned about the past, present, and future of public transportation in Kansas City. We began the day at Thornton Tomasetti with a presentation from Bradley Wolf, a Historic Preservation Officer with the city of Kansas City. He discussed the history of public transportation from the 1880s to the present, from horse-drawn carriages to the extensive streetcar network of the 1930s. With the availability of the automobile, the public transportation system in Kansas City dwindled and eventually, the last streetcar line closed in 1957.

The next stop was a panel about multi-modal transportation at McCownGordon Construction. We invited Eric Rogers of BikeWalkKC, Ashley Hand with UGWCKCK, and Mira Felzien with KCATA. We discussed the types of transit available in Kansas City besides the streetcar: buses, cycling, and micro-transit like RideKC Bikes and Bird Scooters. We talked about different categories of bus routes, how routes are decided and maintained, and the permanence of bus stop infrastructure. We also learned of some city incentives available to businesses to include bicycle infrastructure and encourage multi-modal transit.

The next stop of the day was the streetcar Vehicle Maintenance Facility. During this stop, David Johnson with the Regional Transit Alliance, Tom Gerand with the Kansas City Streetcar Authority, and Trivecee Penelton with Vireo and

founder of Penelton Interactive, talked about the streetcar's future. The conversation centered around what it takes to plan a streetcar route, garner support, and community engagement. We discussed some lessons learned from the 2016 streetcar project, including what it took to get local businesses to buy into a streetcar route, and how that informs community engagement for future extensions.

We closed the session with a tour of the Vehicle Maintenance Facility with Lauren Krutty. We walked through the high bays, learned about how the streetcars are assembled, and how they're fixed when they break down. With 8 new streetcars arriving in Kansas City in the coming months, Lauren described the rigorous testing process the streetcars undergo before public use. We also learned about the streetcar wrap designs and how they are installed.



*Tour of the Vehicle Maintenance Facility*





*The Pillars group in front of the Rock Island Bridge*



*Pillars learning about the Greenline from Steve McDowell*

## MARCH: PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

In March, the Pillars group explored the subjects of planning and development. The session started with a panel of city leaders, including Bill Dietrich with the Downtown Council; Councilman Jonathan Duncan, 6th district; Joe Perry with PortKC; and Jeff Williams, City Planner. This group represented different city stakeholders like planners (KCMO), developers (PortKC), users (Councilman representing people in the city), and a unifying group (Downtown Council of Kansas City). The group discussed long-range planning for the city, and how an organizing document like the 2030 Imagine Downtown Kansas City plan came to be. How does a city balance commerce and tourism with the needs and wants of its residents? How do we maintain progress while preserving attainability? We discussed housing, equity, amenities, and community, and how all these factors combine to create a master plan for the city.

The next stop was Hy-Vee arena, where Steve McDowell with BNIM gave a short presentation on the Greenline. What started as an idea shared between colleagues while on a walk has transpired into a grand plan: to unite the city. The Greenline aims to connect 10 miles of trails across the city and create a walkable and bike-able loop to connect neighborhoods and encourage community. During the presentation, we discussed similar initiatives nationwide and how they positively or negatively affected the surrounding community. We explored topics of the Kansas City Greenline

such as fundraising, branding, marketing, and collaboration of the many entities required to bring such a vision to life.

The Rock Island Bridge will serve as one of the many trailheads that will comprise the Greenline and was the final stop for the session. Michael Zeller with Flying Truss gave the group a tour of the construction site for the Rock Island Bridge. He shared how the idea evolved from “Chicken on a Bridge” to the elaborate project as it is known today: a floating trailhead that will include catered-style food-service restaurant, bar, event venue, and more! We discussed some of the challenges and benefits of retrofitting bridges into entertainment venues, and how to deal with things such as safety, utilities, and security of patrons once the project opens.



*Michael Zeller showing the amenities that will be on the Rock Island Bridge.*





## APRIL: SUSTAINABILITY

In April, the Pillars Leadership Program focused on the region's rich history of leadership and action on climate change, forging a path ahead to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

The session began by welcoming Climate Action KC President Jeremy Knoll and Building Energy Exchange KC Executive Director Ashley Sadowski to speak about the climate action happening on a regional scale across the Kansas City metro area. This discussion challenged the class to consider how to shape the built environment into a central solution to the climate emergency.

The class then connected with KC Water to learn about the city's water system. We started with a visit to a green infrastructure project in the West Bottoms, an area of the city

that is challenged by an antiquated combined sewer system. We then ventured to the Westside Wastewater Treatment Plant where the class got up close and personal with the reality of wastewater treatment in our city.

The final stop was a breath of fresh air at Boulevard Brewing Company, where the class got an early viewing of the brewery's Earth Day tour, which highlighted its sustainable practices and community engagement. The class enjoyed beverages with stellar views of the city from Boulevard's green roof capped with solar panels.







*A ride on the Nelson-Atkins freight elevator*



*Pillars at Belger Arts Center surrounded by their latest glass exhibit*

## MAY: ARTS & CULTURE

In May, the Pillars Leadership Program immersed itself in the vibrant arts and culture scene of Kansas City. Our session offered a broad overview of the diverse locations, mediums, and scales that define the city's artistic landscape. We explored how exposure, education, and mentorship nurture and grow the local arts economy.

We kicked off with an engaging panel discussion at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, featuring respected representatives from three of Kansas City's premier art institutions: Matt Smith, Head Exhibition Designer at the Nelson-Atkins; Samantha Maloney, Exhibition Coordinator at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art; and Eileen Weir, Chair of the Community Engagement Committee for the Parade of Hearts. Their conversations provided valuable insights into the considerations, coordination, opportunities, and challenges involved in creating exhibits and public art installations. It was fascinating to hear their different perspectives, highlighting both commonalities and unique approaches of their respective institutions.

After the panel, we enjoyed a rare behind-the-scenes tour of the Nelson-Atkins Museum's art storage and maintenance facilities. This was followed by a glimpse into the production and design processes behind the museum's newest exhibit, showcasing the works of Niki de Saint Phalle.

Next, we visited the Belger Arts Center. We received an overview of the Glass Annex's capabilities and viewed the current exhibits. Staff members guided us through the Ceramic Studio, explaining the classes offered to the public and studio spaces available to artists of all skill levels. Our visit was culminated by meeting Michael Sims, who shared stories from his 40-year career in lithography at the Lawrence Lithography Workshop and demonstrated his studio process.

Our final stop was at Studios Inc., a facility in the Crossroads Arts District offering a residency program for mid-career artists at no cost. We met two resident artists, learned about their work and their experiences in the program. We wrapped up the day with a happy hour at Torn Label Brewing, conveniently located in the same building as Studios Inc.



*Learning from artist Hong chun Zhang in her Studios Inc. studio*