



# Apple Creek YMCA

*A Miron Construction Case Study*

## Setting Out To Be Different, And To Make A Difference

*What does it mean to be a sustainable organization?*

While the term 'green' in corporate America originally related to environmental issues, it has grown to include all aspects of sustainability and corporate social responsibility.

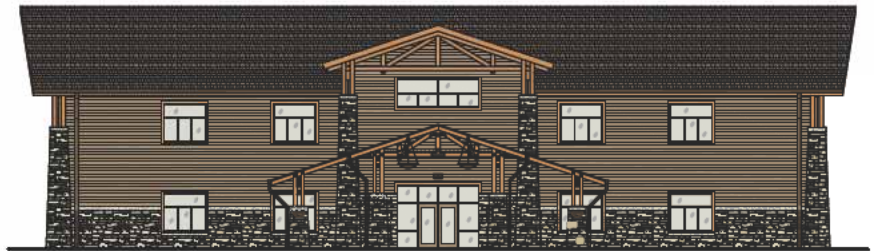
As companies continue to open their eyes to issues like global warming and climate change, and attempt to grasp an understanding of renewable resources and "green" building, they search for organizations with a firm knowledge of sustainability to answer questions and help them progress. The Apple Creek YMCA is no exception, and presented a great opportunity to exemplify what "green" building should be.

In 2008, YMCA of the Fox Cities approached Miron Construction Co., Inc. for assistance in building their new, green facility: The Apple Creek YMCA and Nature Preserve.

Their vision for the new facility was simple: add value to the lives of Apple Creek YMCA members. Their goal was to enhance the spirits, minds and bodies of their members by designing and creating an environmentally sound, peaceful environment, dedicated to sustainability in every operational facet, program and practice.

It was Miron's job to bring Apple Creek YMCA's vision to life within the walls of their new facility. Miron's strategies, ideas and methodologies helped the Apple Creek YMCA reach their goal by creating an environment that increases positive contributions to conservation, biodiversity, ecology, cultural heritage and Christian fellowship, ensuring all who enter the facility have a unique, earthly experience.

## THE APPLE CREEK YMCA STORY



*From the beginning, Miron Construction, Gries Architectural Group and the YMCA of the Fox Cities teamed up to provide a managed approach to green design in all aspects of the project. From conception to occupancy, leaders of the Apple Creek project focused their efforts on the innovative approaches to sustainability that would bring the project to life.*

*Through the assistance of Miron's experience-based design and sustainable services teams, and in collaboration with Gries, over 20 innovative programs and services were developed through a collaborative process aimed at increasing the number of members using the facility. These unique ideas and solutions have gained national praise for 'bringing to life' the dream of the facility.*

### DESIGN FEATURES

To design this unique building to the specific goals of the Apple Creek YMCA, prior to the design phase, the team evaluated human ecology traffic patterns and member experience processes to ensure efficient traffic flow and streamline staff work environments. They also carefully studied the goals and drivers of the Apple Creek YMCA.

By doing this, the project team was able to institute a number of visible and invisible sustainable attributes that both increased value to members and brought the building closer to nature.

Staff spaces were designed to maximize the amount of natural light entering the building, and efficiency was increased by taking simple steps like keeping printers out of pedestrian traffic areas or ensuring ergonomic compliance of chairs, desks, computers and phones. Vending machines were limited to healthy



choices. Gym areas were provided, creating exercise options for staff in the workplace and showers were installed to encourage daily use. A library was built to support educational efforts. Soothing, earth-toned colors and natural fabrics and fibers line the building's interior, visually affecting both staff and members who enter the Apple Creek YMCA experience.

Not visible, however, are a number of sustainable features that compose the truly green building: Low-emitting paints, flooring, wood and aggregate materials were used throughout the facility, and a number of key components (HVAC, lighting, operational systems, etc.) were chosen to maximize energy performance and minimize the building's negative environmental impact. Roofing materials with a high Solar Reflectance Index (SRI) help reduce heat island effect and minimize impact on micro climate and human and wildlife habitats; all non-emergency interior lighting is automatically set to turn off during non-business hours; and exterior areas are only lit (with LED post lights) as necessary for safety and comfort.

These visible and non-visible characteristics each come together to create the ultimate green experience for both staff and members.

### NATURE LAB

The Bruce Purdy Nature Lab is a unique resource that offers the opportunity to examine, explore and understand the patterns, structures and interactions of design in nature. The facility includes a live plant and animal sanctuary and a study room devoted to natural history, with a reference library and clipping file, archives of slides, tapes, videos and x-ray photographs. A computer and camera workstation, with dissecting and compound microscopes for viewing small specimens and prepared slide mounts, allows for the creation of digital or micro-photographic images.



*Co-locating the nature lab and workshop areas proved to be an effective method of increasing face-to-face interactions between members and support staff.*



*Many young children spend a great deal of their waking hours in childcare settings. Part of their learning day can (and should) occur outdoors in healthy, developmentally-appropriate areas.*

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL PRESCHOOL**

While many teachers and administrators give careful consideration to designing indoor environments for children, they often neglect the same careful planning for outdoor learning areas, though these areas are crucial to healthy development.

The Apple Creek YMCA outdoor environment provides a stage for action, stimulating play, learning and physical activity. Children learn by interacting with other children, adults and natural learning materials found in their environment (play props, toys, small animals, plants, pebbles, sand, etc.). This unique environment exposes children to opportunities to explore, question and develop theories about how things work and how different environmental aspects relate to the world that they see.

#### **KIDS GARDEN**

Apple Creek YMCA uses gardening as a vehicle for encouraging children to make healthy food choices, augmenting classroom studies with experiential learning, building a love of nature, stimulating social interaction, and facilitating cultural exchange. Children and their parents learn about gardens, flowers, vegetables and the principles of horticulture in a fun and unique atmosphere.



Also included is a website for students to learn about the beauty of gardens, and the care involved in planning, nurturing and enjoying the benefits of gardening in a variety of spaces and places.

### **GREEN FITNESS**

True “green gym” programs were started in Europe; now, Northeast Wisconsin can see its first at the Apple Creek YMCA. This low-cost program is structured around group meetings of adults who want to do their part to help the environment. A moderated, outdoor warm-up and cool-down bookend a unique activity (such as composting) that focuses on conservation and allows members to be out and active in nature while being educated and connecting with others who share their desire to improve the condition of our planet.

### **ORGANIC ATHLETE**

Beyond the basic YMCA membership, this unique club exists to help support “green” fitness efforts. These competitive athletes focus on promoting healthy living, ecological responsibility, and compassion throughout the Appleton area. Members meet, train, and compete with other athletes who are striving to keep a positive influence on the world through their chosen physical activity. This group takes planetary wellness one step further by wearing organic clothing and using eco-friendly bags, towels, and water bottles (refill not landfill).



## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND BEYOND



*Nature Study Classroom  
& Cross-Curricular  
Activities: Science, Geography,  
Physical Education and Art are  
used to explore basic themes and  
develop an understanding and  
respect for the environment.*

*The Apple Creek YMCA offers a number of environmental programs, including:*

**ENVIRONMENTAL DIRECTOR** - As one of the only Environmental Directors in the United States, the Apple Creek YMCA Environmental Director works with youth in the Fox Cities Community to provide educational guidance on a variety of issues surrounding pollution, waste disposal and public health.

**TREES & WOODLAND** - Understand sustainable woodland management through study and games: tree hugging, tree interviewing, garland making and a celebratory tree feast in the barn or around the campfire.

**WATER** - Understand man's impact on our precious water supply at a farm level through pond ecology, art in nature and cookery.

**ADAPTATION TO HABITAT** - Through observation and games, study the natural history of plant, fungi, insect, bird and mammal species in different woodland, wetland, grassland and other habitats.

**HABITAT ORIENTEERING** – Move from woodland to ancient ponds to hedges to veteran trees, all while following clues and answering questions.

**COUNTRY CRAFTS & SKILLS** – A day of practical challenges: plant trees, design a living willow sculpture and solve brain-teasing dilemmas in teams.

**CAMP NAN A BO SHO** - Campers prepare to explore nature and camping activities through a variety of programs including: archery, riflery, swimming, boating, fishing, hiking, campfires, arts & crafts, nature studies, sports and games and camp-outs.

**NATURE PRESERVE** – Complete with nature trails, this 186-acre preserve brings the dream of Bruce Purdy to life. This protected woodland area provides a unique opportunity for ‘green fitness’ activities for members.

We have been blessed with a beautiful and amazing planet, and it is our collective responsibility to take care of it.

The Apple Creek YMCA facility brings that mission to life by promoting education and understanding of our surroundings, and encouraging community members to become and stay physically, emotionally, and environmentally healthy.



*Members of the Apple Creek YMCA enjoy the 12 miles of hiking/running trails, nature education areas, and the “flora and fauna” of Northeast Wisconsin.*



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