



BY NICHOLAS FOXX

# MAKING ITSELF KNOWN

*The pavilion at Crawford Memorial Park serves as a community landmark while the rest of the park takes shape*

**H**owever nostalgic, the grainy black and white photos of children frolicking in the spray of a fire hydrant on a sweltering summer day remind us that access to recreational water parks is not assured for many underprivileged and overlooked communities. In recognition of both the lack of facilities in many neighborhoods and the obsolescence of those that were in place, the city of Dallas, Texas embarked on an ambitious plan to provide these resources city-wide. Under the leadership of recently retired Director Willis Winters, FAIA, the city's parks and recreation department proposed an ambitious plan that would include the establishment of 14 new aquatic parks. Ranging from regional centers to splash pools, these parks were situated to provide equal geographic access to all of the city's residents, with the broader goal of achieving greater equity among neighborhoods.





The project team for the initial six projects was led by Kimley Horn, with Counsilman Hunsacker and Associates serving as the aquatic consultant. Ibañez Shaw Architecture was selected to design the buildings at Lake Highlands North Park, as well as the Cove at Crawford Memorial Park. Functional elements, such as ticketing, food service, staff offices, locker and restroom facilities, and housing for pool equipment, were built. The architectural goal of the project, however, was to create an enduring civic symbol embodying the aspirations of the community, voiced in the many early public meetings. As such, the project represents a committed investment from the city not only in a significant public amenity, but also in underprivileged areas.

### **A HOPEFUL FUTURE**

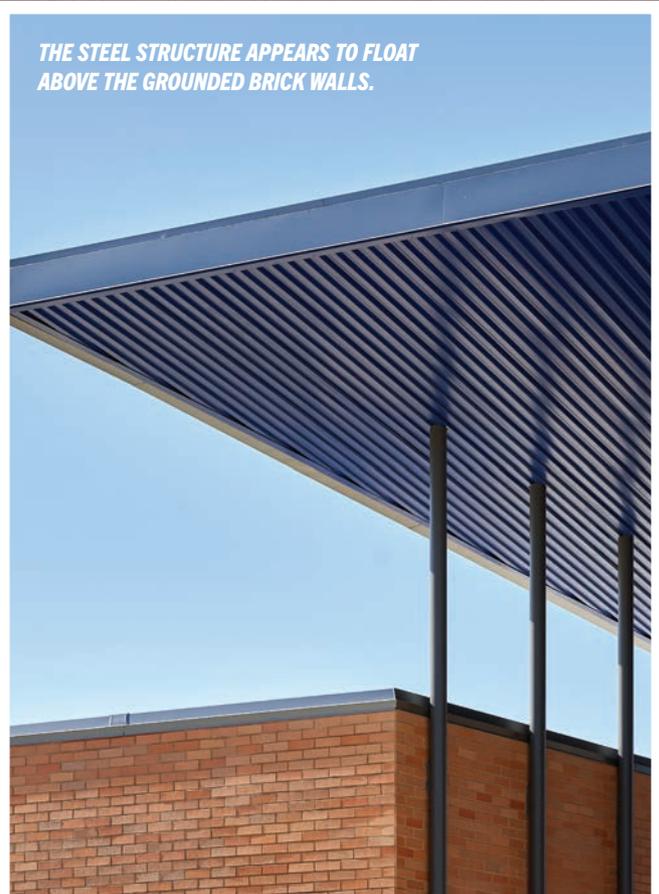
Crawford Memorial Park is a 272-acre park serving the community of Pleasant Grove, which is among the lowest-income neighborhoods in Dallas, with over a 90-percent minority population—nearly 30 percent of whom live below the poverty line. Located in Southeast Dallas, Crawford Memorial is the second-largest park in the city, exceeded in acreage only by White Rock Lake Park. The site of the aquatic center is located at the southern tip of the park, avoiding disruption of the popular, wooded walking trails and play fields, with easy access to major thoroughfares. A 2012 master plan proposed significant development within Crawford Park, including the establishment of a lake, recreation center, Blackland prairie conservation area, pastoral park land, and a post oak savannah restoration area. According to the parks and recreation Project Manager David Mills, many of the ideas in the master plan have a new impetus with the near completion of the aquatic center.

### **A GRAND ENTRANCE**

The architects determined early in the design process that the pavilion would serve both as a strong symbol of community and as a recognizable landmark within the park, with an emphasis on the procession of arrival and the prominence of the pavilion upon the site. Visitors arrive via



*THE CANOPY OF THE PAVILION AT CRAWFORD MEMORIAL PARK IN DALLAS, TEXAS TOWERS ABOVE THE BRICK STRUCTURES ON EITHER SIDE OF IT TO SERVE AS A FOCAL POINT AS THE ENTRANCE TO THE COVE WATER PARK.*



*THE STEEL STRUCTURE APPEARS TO FLOAT ABOVE THE GROUNDED BRICK WALLS.*

a winding, wooded road that emerges to a view of the long and low pavilion that visually bookends the space bordered on three sides by trees.

The entrance to The Cove is marked by a folded canopy that asserts its hierarchical importance through a formal change in height, as well as a distinct change to steel from the brick of the structure below. Through the shift in material, the visually lighter canopy structure appears to float above the grounded brick walls. The canopy becomes a prominent and dynamic element that clearly articulates the path of entry, featuring a vivid blue color overhead—the only chromatic element in the structure—as a point of further distinction. “We consciously eschewed the use of tropical colors and beach-culture references in favor of a simple yet rich palette of materials,” says firm Principal Gregory Ibañez, FAIA. “We believe that public buildings should meet a higher standard since they are our buildings, and they should reflect the permanence found in the best of our public architecture.” The pavilion demonstrates a civic architecture that is unpretentious, yet formally distinct, refreshingly dissociated from the nostalgic language that has historically informed public works.

The pavilion’s apparent density or otherwise impenetrability presents itself as a necessary barrier between the parking lot and the waterpark—acting as

both visual and auditory restraint. The pavilion has three distinct sections that address appropriate programmatic groupings: management, maintenance/equipment, and amenities. Management and amenity-oriented spaces flank the entrance canopy for unobstructed access by visitors and staff members, while the maintenance facility, housing the pumping and filtration equipment, is separated from the visitors’ circulation path yet is easily accessible for technical staff members. A language of linked masonry forms is most conspicuous in the relationship between the entrance canopy and the broader massing of the pavilion. It is more subtly reciprocated in the carefully detailed brickwork

that rewards closer inspection as people approach the facility. Once they are inside, the profile of the building reveals a series of canopies that dramatically cantilever from the structure, gesturing towards the pool while providing shade from the harsh southern sun. The canopies also articulate informal social spaces for park goers.



**A SUBSTANTIAL PRESENCE**

As of 2021, The Cove at Crawford Memorial Park is considered a great success. Senior Manager Robin Steinshneider relates that the facility was “very well-received by the community within the first year” and continues to be “one of the most popular among the regional facilities.” It has exceeded expectations and attracts significant traffic from beyond the immediate area—fulfilling its role as a substantial landmark for the community. As Crawford Park is further developed by the city, the aquatic center will remain a decisive asset for not only the Pleasant Grove community but also the broader city. **PRB**

*Nicholas Foxx is an up-and-coming design professional and graduate student in the School of Architecture at the University of Texas at Austin. With experience in research and publication, his writing and design work emphasizes investigative spatial research as a means of reshaping the built environment—in pursuit of an architecture that is both more equitable and experientially meaningful.*

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