“How can we best serve our membership in 2022?”

While simple in theory, the question above has continually proven to be a challenge given the ever-evolving state of our profession, our environment, our public health climate, our mental health, and our social condition in general. AIA Grand Rapids is committed to addressing the implications of these circumstances, and we are confident that the partnerships and programming being developed by our chapter will provide value to our members this year and beyond.

I am proud to serve as president of our Grand Rapids chapter and look forward to opportunities to grow with, and learn from, other components throughout the state of Michigan. Here in Grand Rapids, our board is approaching the 2022 calendar year with cautious optimism toward the trajectory of our improving public health crisis; in that spirit of optimism, we are looking forward to an amazing slate of programming with opportunities for our members to reconnect, reinvest, and re-engage.

In addition to our planned programming, AIAGR COTE, and CEU education offerings, our chapter is taking 2022 to focus on our collective industry --- and individual members’ --- mental health. Coincidental to our in-development Mindfulness and Stress Management seminar, the chapter is also offering an *“in-person engagement focused on how user conversations can be facilitated to effectively uncover stakeholder needs and emotions in order to design better solutions”*. This mid-April workshop is titled “Listening to Learn” and will be facilitated by Public Agency, an equity-centered design consultancy within the West Michigan Center for Arts + Technology (WMCAT).

These programs not only build technical and emotional acumen with direct applications to our areas of practice -- they also help build interpersonal relationships within our membership. These relationships are crucial to the well-being of our industry and community, with engagement being a primary focus across the AIA at the national, state, and local levels. Our newly minted ProIntro Knowledge Series was conceived to introduce practicing professionals with representatives from the organizations/markets we serve. The intent is for this series to operate quarterly, with a series of expert panelists offering trends, insights, and feedback to the architectural community that serves it, opening dialogue to connect our profession with opportunities for committee work, volunteerism, or further organizational service.

AIA Grand Rapids is also continuing the support our local students with financial scholarships through two of our partner organizations: the ACE Mentor Program of West Michigan and the Michigan Architectural Foundation. Through these organizations, AIA Grand Rapids has funded annual scholarships for local area students to pursue post-secondary education and the skilled trades for future careers in the AEC industry.

And finally, our chapter is advancing our 2023 Strategic Plan efforts into the 2022 calendar year with the formation and establishment of our Strategic Planning Committee, comprised of a diverse group of industry stakeholders local to the greater Grand Rapids area. This committee includes AIAGR EXCOM members, general membership with a preference for non-board members, emeritus representation, emerging professionals, and professional affiliates. Our chapter looks forward to yet another year of impactful programming, member engagement, and community stewardship to further advance the architectural community and the individuals that comprise it. It is through these efforts that the architectural industry can communicate value and insight to our respective communities. We are looking forward to this year, and to hearing more about the great work being performed by the AIA components in our great state of Michigan.

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