

Spears Architects - busy with beauty

By Paul Weideman

The director of the new Santa Fe Rape Crisis Center called Spears Architects a few months after the facility's March 2004 completion with the best kind of feedback.

"Barbara Goldman called me and told me she got a letter from a woman who walked into our building and was just awestruck by the power of the architecture and what it said about the organization's mission," Beverley Spears said.

Her firm's other architect, James Horn, was the project designer on the 11,613-square-foot Rape Crisis Center. He conceived it as an H-shape, the two long wings housing the center's family advocacy center, a safehouse, and offices for law enforcement, a sexual-assault nurse examiner, and the Counseling Against Rape and Assault program.

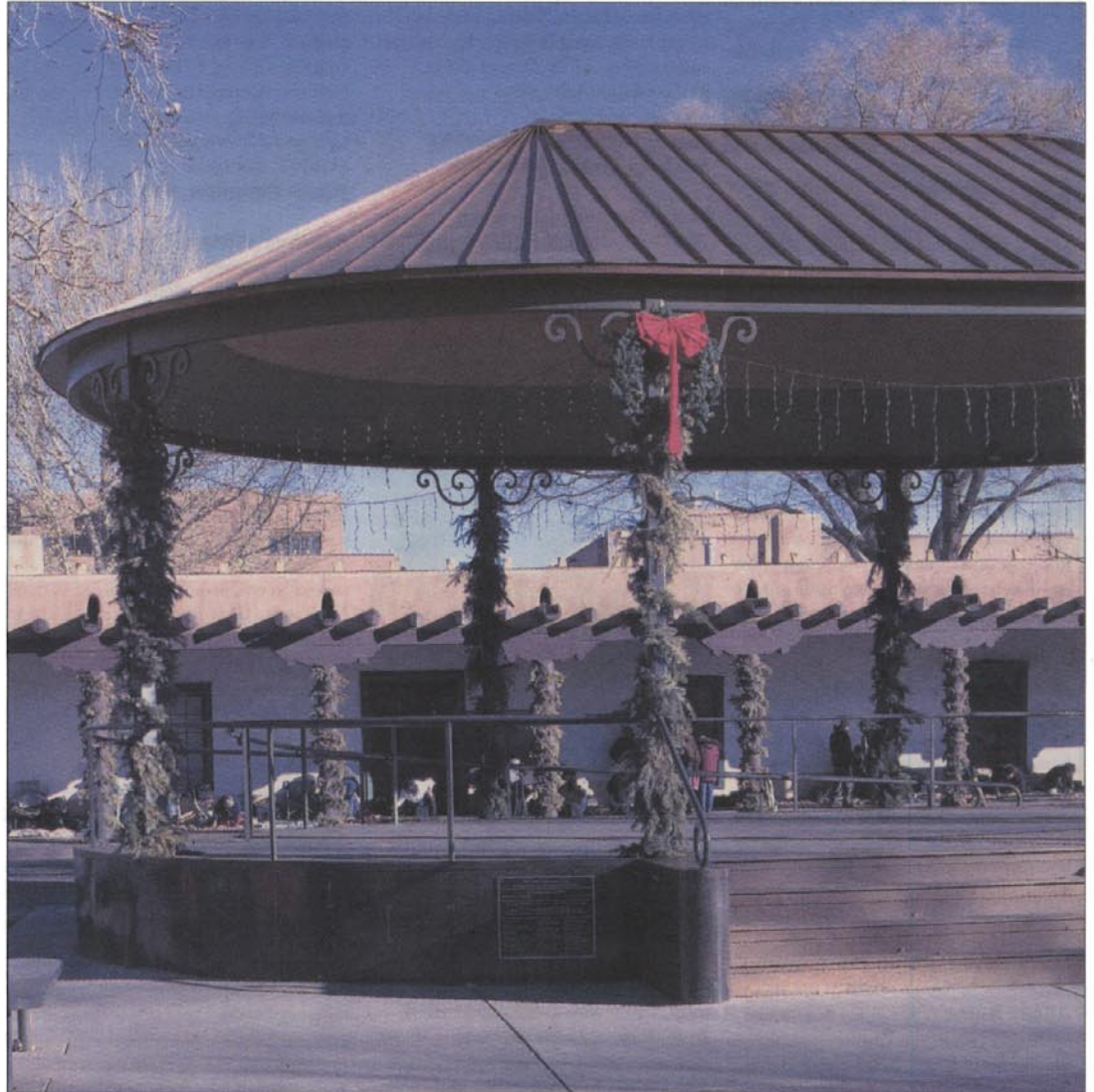
The staff at the Santa Fe Rape Crisis Center, which was previously located in the Second Street Studios, set their sights high on plans for a new facility. "They needed a certain size lot, a place that was accessible and on a bus route," Spears said. "It had to be in a location where it would be accepted by the neighborhood, and it had to be affordable, so it was really a tough assignment. We worked with Barker Realty and John Rehders General Contractor and found a site in Tierra Contenta.

"They also wanted something earthy, maybe a straw-bale building, but that is not affordable so we worked with them to provide some curves in the sheetrock walls and we did some rich colors."

The wings are stuccoed red and a light tan, respectively. Inside, colors were specified to coincide with functions: a calming blue in major reception areas; in other sections the walls may be a healthy green, and energetic red, or a joyful red-orange.

The facility's H-shape allows for ample natural light, privacy, and security. "The building employs sunken reveals with windows to offset the expanses of wall masses," Horn said. "We used windows in colors to match the stucco, which produces a sort of carved-out look.

"Inside, we used a lot of skylights, especially in all the offices that don't have



PHOTOS BY KIM KURIAN

The Santa Fe Plaza bandstand

windows. As part of the daylighting plan, the office doors have sandblasted glass so there's an element of privacy."

That need for privacy, and for the separation of different parts of the building, was an important part of the architectural plan. Exam and interview rooms are completely private; even the doors have special sound-blocking qualities.

A wood-slat dropped ceiling adds warmth and style to the Rape Crisis Center

and two courtyards provide peaceful outdoor environments. The smaller of these, planted with aspen trees, is used as a renewal/meditation space. All of the plantings at the center — they include ornamental grasses, New Mexico privet, purple ash and locust and crabapple trees — are nourished with water pumped from underground cisterns that store rainwater.

The building shape also permits additions. A future phase would include

buildings the center can lease out, perhaps to therapists and other compatible users.

The new bandstand on the Santa Fe Plaza, designed by Beverley Spears, was another challenge.

"By its nature it would be a focal point, but I didn't want it to be too noticeable because the Plaza's an authentic, beautiful space," she said. "I wanted it to be pretty transparent."

The result, which was dedicated on



The Santa Fe Rape Crisis Center designed by Spears Architects' James Horn. Below, the local newspaper's new building at One New Mexican Plaza.

July 4, is a lozenge-shaped structure 24 feet wide and 38 feet long. The height of the stage, 30 inches off the ground, was determined by the requirements that it be wheelchair-accessible. "That is a little low for performances but it does keep the massiveness down and maintains the visibility through the bandstand," Spears said.

At this point in the interview she brought out photographs she had taken, while working on the bandstand design, of gazebo/bandstand structures in Las Vegas, Taos, La Mesilla, Silver City, Albuquerque's Old Town and in Juarez, Mexico. She believes Santa Fe's is the only wheelchair-accessible one in New Mexico.

The stage of the Santa Fe bandstand is massaranduba hardwood on joists designed to offer some resilience for dancers. The roof is standing-seam copper that weathers to a dull brown. The skirt around the bottom of the stage is patina'd steel.

"The ceiling is perforated steel with acoustical insulation above, so some of the sound is reflected and some is absorbed," Spears said. "The ceiling is painted soft green on the outer edge and soft pink inside, so as you approach the building you see the green that goes with the canopy of the trees, then as you get closer you see the more festive pink."

The steel building, which was designed to be vandal-proof, has a satisfying solidity but also an elegance — and scroll-form

brackets at the junctions of posts and roof conjure the more decorative kiosks of days gone by.

Spears Architects designed the lobby, office space and facade at the new Santa Fe New Mexican printing and circulation facility near the I-25/Cerrillos Road intersection.

"I wanted this to be a contemporary building and that worked well with their budget because doing corbels and vigas is expensive, and I think it also says something about the newspaper as progressive," Spears said.

The newspaper did not follow two of the architect's design ideas that may have lent the building a more iconic aspect. "We thought it was important for people coming into the lobby to be able to see the new press so we designed it with glass all the way to the floor but *The New Mexican* didn't go for that and just did it from waist-high," she said. "Also, the idea was for the office area, which has that folded appearance from the highway, to look like newsprint with the tan and beige-gray colors and with bands of windows like type, but they changed our spec from dark-grey

windows to anodized clear aluminum, so it doesn't look quite right."

Spears Architects is almost finished with restoration work on the exterior of the Lamy Building. The job includes repairing woodwork and stonework and rebuilding the *espedaña* or bell-tower.

The firm is working on a new library/classroom building for Santa Fe Preparatory School. The school is providing consultation with the National Renewable Energy Laboratory to achieve a LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) certification.

Spears also is involved in the restoration of Seton Castle south of Santa Fe and in the master-planning for the St. Francis Cathedral/Marian Hall property, as well as various residential projects.

The list of recent Spears Architects

projects includes the Santa Fe Preparatory School commons and science addition (2001), restorations of the historic Mary Cabot Wheelwright house (2001, won AIA design award) and Stockstill house (2001, won Santa Fe preservation award), the Open Hands facility (2002), a library/classroom building for Rio Grande School (2002), Lannan Foundation meeting house (2002), and Los Luceros visitor center (2004).

In mid-December Spears accepted three Su Casa 2004 Residential Design Awards for the Thomas house off Fin del Sendero, the Morin house in Galisteo and the Watts-Russell house beyond Old Road Ranch. She is the author of *American Adobes: Rural Houses of Northern New Mexico* (Ancient City Press, 1986).

