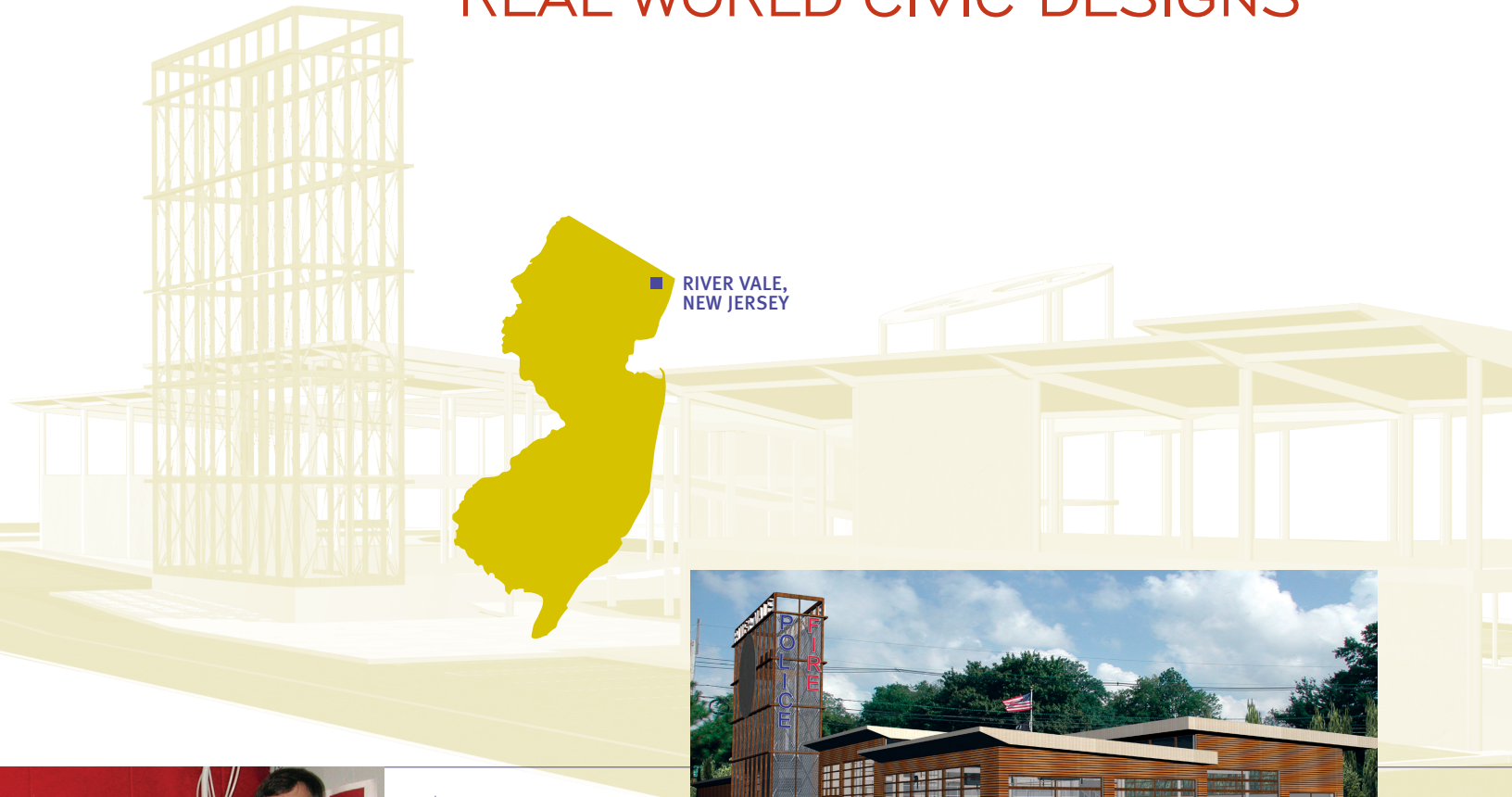


THE RIVER VALE

NJSOA STUDENTS DEVELOP
REAL-WORLD CIVIC DESIGNS



Glenn
GOLDMAN
*Director of the NJSOA
Imaging Laboratory*



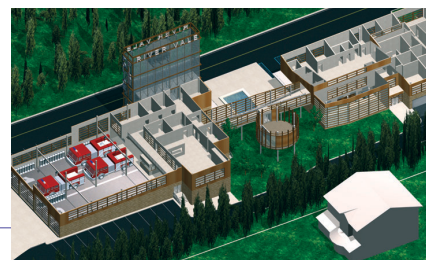
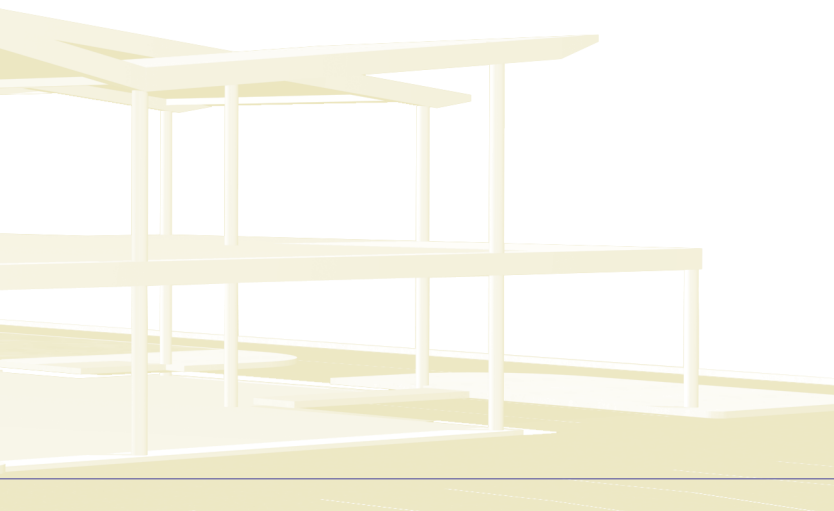
Elliot
GLASSMAN



PROJECT

IT'S NOT OFTEN THAT A DESIGN STUDIO PROJECT FOR ARCHITECTURE STUDENTS TURNS OUT TO BE A TERRIFIC LEARNING OPPORTUNITY FOR THE STUDENTS, A USEFUL EXERCISE FOR A COMMUNITY, AND AN INTERESTING TEACHING EXPERIENCE FOR THE PROFESSOR. BUT THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED IN A STUDIO FOR FOURTH-YEAR STUDENTS TAUGHT BY GLENN GOLDMAN, PROFESSOR AND DIRECTOR OF THE IMAGING LABORATORY AT NJIT'S NEW JERSEY SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE (NJSOA).

AUTHOR: KAREN BAAR *has written for many publications in addition to NJIT Magazine, including The New York Times, Natural Health, Parenting, Yale Medicine and Columbia Public Health. Her most recent book is For My Next Act...Women Scripting Life After Fifty.*

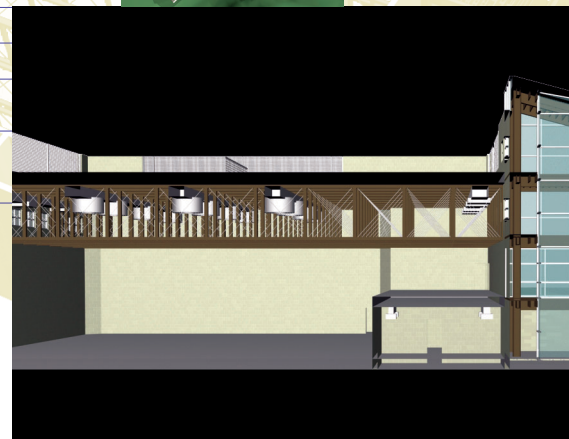


The extraordinary train of events began when Goldman was approached by his former student, George Paschalis (NJSOA '96). Now the mayor of River Vale, a Bergen County, New Jersey, municipality, Paschalis explains: "We had a need — a downtown in need of revitalization and an aging municipal infrastructure — and NJSOA is always looking for real-life problems. I turned to my alma mater for assistance, and they delivered."

The idea was for students to develop designs for a community center and a public safety complex, which would house River Vale's police and fire departments. According to Goldman, this was a rare set of circumstances. "These are building types students might actually encounter in their careers. We weren't taking work away from other architects, because the town wasn't sure what they needed or how it could be done. Our project would help start

the dialog within the community to determine exactly what they needed. Finally, we had a very enlightened client who was able to participate in the project as an architect and from the political point of view."

The preliminary "foundation," so to speak, for the project was laid by Jason Weisman, a third-year NJSOA student who was working in River Vale as an intern participating in the Housing Scholars program sponsored by First Union National Bank and the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs. Says Weisman, "I met with the chiefs of the fire and police departments and got a rundown of what they needed in a new station and where they wanted it built. I interviewed people in town to help evaluate the impact of various sites, and set priorities — what was essential versus what would be nice to have. This was a great internship. I worked



Christopher
COSENZA

Joshua
THOMPSON

closely with the mayor and got a feel for how to get things accomplished.”

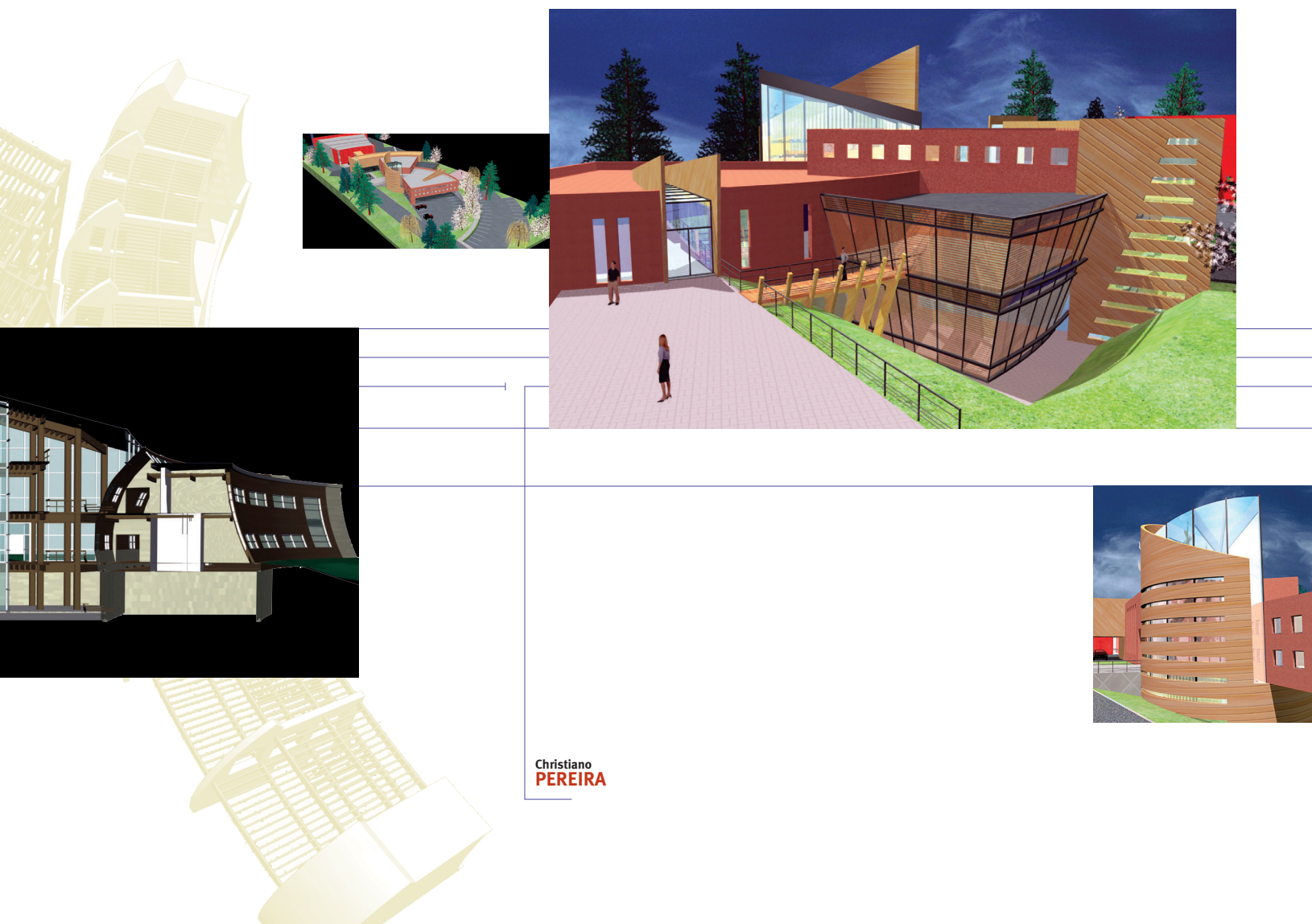
After reviewing the information provided by Weisman, the NJSOA students who would submit designs met with the mayor, and the police and fire chiefs, and toured the sites. Then, explains student Chris Cosenza, who worked on a design for the community center: “We spent several weeks brainstorming ideas, sketching, modeling, and corresponding with the clients. This was a far cry from a typical theoretical studio.” Once they presented their preliminary designs to their “clients” — Goldman, other architects and the mayor — each student was given the go-ahead to develop detailed plans for one of the two buildings.

The public safety building was especially challenging, says Baila Ehrenberg, another student. “Because of the sheer number of requirements for each depart-

ment, and the need to fit them into one building, it was much more complicated than anything we’d done before. For example, the fire department needed frontage to get their trucks in and out. And the police station required visibility even though, for the most part, it was behind the fire station to allow room for the trucks. And it was a deep, narrow site.”

“I turned to my alma mater for assistance, and they delivered.” — *River Vale Mayor George Paschalis*

Elliot Glassman, who also worked on the public safety building, adds: “A lot of things came up that I would never have considered, but working with the police and fire chiefs, I got a good sense of their needs and how they’d operate. There were technical



Christiano
PEREIRA

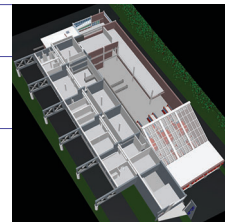
requirements, OSHA requirements, and nuances of the mechanical systems. In addition, the police and fire departments are usually separate; putting them together was more challenging.” Glassman’s contribution to the River Vale project subsequently won him the 2004 Herman C. Litwack Annual Scholarship, given by NJSOA for excellence in a design studio project that integrates design and construction technology.

Perhaps the greatest challenge came one morning in early November 2003 when the students presented their designs for both buildings to the mayor and other public officials. “They asked for some changes and wanted certain ambiguities clarified,” says Goldman. “The students were shocked. With only a month left to the semester, the program

changes? I explained, ‘Welcome to life outside school; clients always make changes. This is a good dose of what it’s like to present to a client.’”

Still, the students appreciated the input. Says Glassman, “Usually you’re just presenting to architecture professors. This was the first time I ever presented to a client, and they are looking at concrete, functional aspects of a building — how does it work, can they fit their cars in? It’s got to serve the purpose, from the client’s perspective. As a student you’re not really exposed to that.”

When the students had finished their projects, the mayor selected five designs for a public presentation, which took place in January 2004. (Those five projects were presented in great detail, but more than a dozen were shown.) Says Goldman, “We did



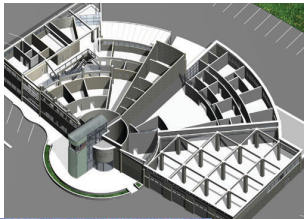
Baila
EHRENBURG

Matthew
WOLFE

it all digitally, presenting the designs superimposed on site photographs, so the community could understand what the buildings would really look like.”

The River Vale experience goes farther than most design studio projects. NJSOA Associate Dean James Dyer says, “Often, it’s a more theoretical presentation of what can occur when you’ve got a design problem. But sometimes the studio actually has an impact.” And that’s certainly the case here. The students gave the River Vale community options to discuss; in fact, a municipal facilities committee is reviewing their designs. “Our intent is to put together a building program and implement some of the studio’s suggestions. This is not a pie in the sky venture,” says Paschalis.

As Goldman says, “It was a win-win-win situation.” ■



DESIGNING A DIFFERENT WORLD

“We were constantly challenged by the faculty to find solutions to real-life problems, to become active beyond the drafting table.”

In large measure, it was this aspect of his education as an architecture student at NJIT that motivated George Paschalis to become involved in community service and politics. Today, Paschalis is mayor of River Vale, New Jersey, the town where he grew up.

“I think the real-world focus of the studio courses at New Jersey School of Architecture is really unique,” Paschalis says. “The preparation for working as an architect is outstanding, of course. But the program also encourages a sense of civic responsibility and leadership.”

While at NJSOA, Paschalis responded to this challenge as a resident assistant, vice president of the student senate, and summer Housing Scholar with Habitat for Humanity in Newark. He subsequently helped to organize a student chapter of Habitat for Humanity at NJIT. Paschalis admits that the course he followed after graduation in 1996 might seem somewhat unorthodox for an architect, though he adds that it reflects the impetus to “make a difference” that was basic to his education. Before entering politics in River Vale, he worked for U.S. Senator Frank Lautenberg and directed the Center for Families and Communities at Rutgers-Newark. He was also assistant director of NJIT’s Office of Community and Public Service.

“Eventually, I asked myself how I could contribute to my hometown,” Paschalis says. “The specific issues that have to be addressed in a community like River Vale may be different from those I encountered in Newark. But the commitment is the same. It’s a matter of doing what we can as individuals to imagine and create a better future.”

