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Contact: Fran Berger, PR Director
617-582-4442
fberger@aia.edu
www.artinstitutes.edu/boston

**Interior Design Students Team Up with Mexican Village on Groundwork for Community Center
Reuse- Recycle – Reclaim - drives design**

(Brookline, MA) August 7, 2010 – What do Interior Design students at Brookline’s New England Institute of Art (NEiA) have in common with a sleepy Mexican village? Thanks to adjunct faculty member Deborah Drew, a shared passion to create a community center.

Drew, who winters in the village of La Penita de Jaltemba, on the west coast of Mexico was attracted to the town for its blending of people with many cultural personalities. She also was drawn by the sense of community and common desires to help La Penita through its growing pains and daily struggles. “We love the town the way it is,” says Drew, but we want to help and do so by making suggestions and backing them up by stressing the importance of recycling, opening the mangroves for fresh water, by providing a few scholarships and building Eco-parks.”

While back in Brookline, Drew, who teaches Interior Design at NEiA, approached her students about taking on a project to help La Penita reach its long-time dream. The center’s design, to benefit everyone from children to the elderly was quickly embraced.

The site is an existing basketball court with two smaller buildings adjacent to the town plaza. Drew brushed off her architectural skills and laid out the program based on what she knew her townsfolk in Mexico wanted. “The project is large; as long and as deep as a 15-story building lying on its side,” says Drew. “I did the base work and then handed it off to the students.”

Each student is concentrating on a specific area. One is creating a yoga studio which impacts another student’s design for the main event area. Another is incorporating a tire wall that abuts the gift shop. The reclaimed tires used on one side create a wall, while on the opposite side those tires are carved into storage spaces. The Center will include an indoor/outdoor play area, an arts and crafts room, a library and reading room, changing room, public restrooms, a commercial kitchen and permanent dining area. The main event area will be able to host up to 300 guests from annual fundraisers to monthly local meetings. There is also a large area dedicated to receiving and organizing recycled items delivered by the townspeople.

Throughout the entire process, the students have corresponded with people in La Penita. “This is a rare opportunity for students to not only design a space, but to work with people of another culture with different needs and desires,” says Drew. “They have worked day and night and gladly attended a weekend class, spending all day Sunday working on the project.” The actual building of the facility may be years away, as Drew and her fellow La Penita residents work to raise the funds, but the groundwork will be laid. “I hope to continue the project in future classes,” adds Drew.

The progress of the student’s work can be tracked on the Community Center response link on <http://jaltembajalapeno.com>.

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