

DESIGN

THIS WEEK AT A GLANCE



## TONA Upgrades and Expands Spaces at Covenant House New York

by Tracy Ostroff  
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**Summary:** Terrence O’Neal Architect LLC (TONA), New York City, currently is hard at work on a \$25 million, 125,000-square-foot reconstruction and upgrade of one of Covenant House New York’s Manhattan locations. The three-building

renovation for the nation’s largest adolescent-care agency—serving homeless, runaway, and at-risk youth—makes up the second step in a 2002 master plan by the firm to rebuild the nonprofit’s busiest location. Principal Terrence O’Neal, AIA, says every part of the redesign reinforces the concept of shelter and welcomes young people in crisis and transition under a name that is both familiar and comforting.

O’Neal explains that through signage, light, and form, the buildings, and particularly the main entranceway, serve as “a shining beacon.” That sense of comfort will emanate first from an elliptical canopy highlighted by a brightly lighted sign announcing Covenant House to the street. The pathway to the main entrance will be lined with in-ground lighting and plentiful greenery and landscape improvements that also reinforce the concepts of shelter and security. These changes will define the courtyard entrance and take it from obscurity to prominence.

### Removing institutional feel

TONA is regrouping, gutting, rebuilding, and improving the residential rooms and

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REFERENCE

Covenant House New York is the nation’s largest adolescent care agency serving homeless, runaway, and at-risk youth. The doors are open 24 hours a day for youth in need. Each year, nearly 7,000 youth seek out their Crisis and Community Centers for safety, shelter, food, and someone to talk to.

Covenant House began more than 30 years ago when six young runaways were given shelter from a snowstorm in the lower east side of Manhattan. Covenant House now has programs in 21 U.S. cities and Latin America. More than 77,000 young people are aided annually by Covenant House in its national and international programs. [Visit the Web site.](#)

Terrence O’Neal Architect LLC [on the Web](#)

Captions

administrative offices. The renovations will increase the residential capacity by 60 percent.



Building A will house all residential quarters. Floors 5-8 will house "Rights of Passage," the longer-term transitional living and education/career guidance program that works to integrate its participants into society. It will be served by a separate entrance and elevator and will be able to accommodate 200 beds. The Crisis Center, on the lower floors of Building A, will be accessed through the main entrance and will be able to accommodate 300 beds.

Building B will include a child-care center and a redesigned chapel on the first floor with a full recreation complex on the upper floors. Building C will house administrative offices, health-care suites, and a renovated cafeteria.

### Designing shelter

Skylights invite natural light to enter the common spaces, and large windows serve the dual purpose of encouraging daylight into the most interior spaces and providing visibility for floor monitoring. TONA also relocated the lounges so they are in the direct line of sight and proximity of program administrators. Indirect lighting and bright primary colors for the interior spaces will provide comfort in a time of general upheaval, O'Neal says. Materials and textures in the outdoor early childhood center define areas and functions. "We remove the institutional feel from the building with ceiling heights that offer intimate proportions, with positive light-filled spaces, and the use of color. These elements in particular will greatly enhance teenagers' quality of life," O'Neal says.

The architects are also providing for high-speed wireless Internet access as well as hardwired computer stations. Covenant House has included an updated network of servers to allow expansion for future computer needs. The architects are significantly upgrading or replacing the electrical, information technology, and mechanical/HVAC systems. TONA architects also had to abide by environmental restrictions that applied to the Covenant House buildings because of their proximity to the Lincoln Tunnel and Port Authority Bus Terminal. To mitigate sound transmission, the architects specified double-glazed windows.

### Building relationship

O'Neal, whose firm's portfolio includes full-service architecture design, project management, and planning services, says it is gratifying to design for clients who "do not normally receive the benefit of architecture services." The architect's work for Covenant House builds on a relationship they have had with the nonprofit for many years. The Keturah W. Wood Mother/Child Crisis Center, also in New York City, was completed in fall 2004. Covenant House construction started during the summer of 2006 and is expected to be completed in April.

Image 1:

New facade treatment with floor-to-ceiling glass articulated at lounges. Photo © Jock Pottle/Esto.

Image 2:

View of the residential building A (right) and administrative office and cafeteria building C (left), with new landscape elements. Photo © Jock Pottle/Esto.

Image 3:

New entrance canopy, with signage at the ring of the ellipse and skylight, allows light to radiate. Photo © Jock Pottle/Esto.