



Transformational Space

THE GLEN T. MACLEOD CAPE ANN YMCA OFFERS A NAUTICAL FEEL AND WELCOMING VIBE FOR ITS COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

BY ALEXANDRA PECCI // PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARSHALL DACKERT

If Chris Lovasco,

president and CEO of the YMCA of the North Shore, could use one word to describe the new Glen T. MacLeod Cape Ann YMCA in Gloucester, it would be “transformational.”

Just looking at the building, designed by Beverly-based architecture firm SV Design, Siemasko + Verbridge, makes it easy to see why. With its airy, nautical feel and welcoming ambiance, it’s at once perfectly representative of Cape Ann and unlike anything the region has seen before, especially in a YMCA. The project won gold at the Boston Remodelers Association of Greater Boston’s 2021 Prism Awards Gala for Excellence in Community Design—Best Commercial Project.

“Our whole campaign really focused on the YMCA that this community deserves,” Lovasco says. “It’s not only the programs and amenities and accessibility...It is the design that this community deserves. It’s an homage to the history of Gloucester [and] the nautical community of Cape Ann.”

That means that the new Cape Ann YMCA, which opened its doors about a year ago, has all the amenities you’d expect (and some you wouldn’t), like an eight-lane pool, an outdoor splash pad, a preschool, spin and yoga studios, fitness and classrooms, a Kids Club babysitting space, multipurpose spaces, a full-size gymnasium, locker rooms, Physical Therapy Gloucester, traumatic brain injury recovery programs, a café, outdoor turf areas, and a playground, plus plenty of parking.

Plus, it’s also a beautifully designed building that looks nothing like the heavy, brick YMCA buildings of yesteryear. Instead, it’s light, bright, stylish, and eye-catching, a community-oriented building with wide-open spaces, diverse resources, and a new location on Gloucester Crossing Road that’s much more accessible than its previous one downtown.

“What that allowed us to do was bring a whole new dimension of service to the community in a new location,” Lovasco says. “It will allow us to really make sure that the Y is welcoming to all and easy to access without barriers.”

Also important to the design is how quintessentially “Cape Ann” it feels.



Cape Ann receives an award-winning fitness facility

Created by SV Design, the building has a nautical feel.



Jennifer Hocherman, AIA, LEED AP, associate principal at SV Design and senior project manager on the Cape Ann YMCA project, says it was “really fun” to have a client that cared about coming up with a design with such a strong sense of place.

“They really wanted it to feel like it belongs in Gloucester, belongs in Cape Ann,” Hocherman says. “You couldn’t just pick this building up and put it down in any other city or town because it was really specific and special to this location.”

The design team went to the Cape Ann Museum for inspiration and drew on the image of a schooner for the project, which is reflected in details like the building’s central “mast” shape and the arcing, sail-shaped front entrance that can be seen “from quite a distance as you come up onto the rotary in Gloucester,” says Thad Siemasko, principal and founder of SV Design.

The nautical atmosphere is carried on inside, from the neutral-colored building materials to the soaring, two-floor entry space and second-floor cross bridge that’s reminiscent of a ship’s balcony.

“We really had to hit the right note with the community,” says Siemasko, and they knew they had when they saw that the Gloucester city seal “has this big schooner image right in the middle of it.”

Even the light fixtures and interior décor, like sails that are suspended from the ceiling, maps, and photographs, recall Cape Ann’s connection to the sea.

“You see these oversized, tubular pendants that essentially look like rain,” says Izzy Kennedy, a project manager for SV Design who handled the interior design and lighting for the project. “It looks as if a wind’s blowing through the central space.”

Although YMCA membership took a hit during the pandemic, it has skyrocketed in recent months, Lovasco says, noting that pre-pandemic they had about 4,000 members and that membership dropped to about 2,200 members during the height of the pandemic. Now that the new building is open, membership stands “today at about 8,700,” he says.

And although the design began pre-pandemic, the outdoor spaces, like the splash pad and picnic areas, have proved especially important as people seek to spend more time

outside while still spending time together.

Lovasco says the new building and its more accessible location have done something else, too: foster a sense of community, bringing people together during a particularly difficult time.

“We want to make sure that everybody, regardless of age or income background, has

the opportunity to come together. There’s a place where you can step in and just meet people, and I think in today’s world, if something is needed more than anything else, it is that ability to come together and appreciate the diversity of thought,” Lovasco says. “It has been a transformational project for the community.” ♦ northshoreymca.org



The YMCA has been a transformational space for the community.

