

Animal architecture: Rescued bee colony gets new waterfront home

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The UB students who won the architecture design competition call the bees' new habitat 'Elevator B.'

(Phys.org) -- A massive and thriving colony of bees living in an abandoned industrial site in Buffalo has been moved into a brand new home, designed for them by architecture graduate students in the University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning.

"Elevator B," as it is called, is a 22 -foot-tall, free-standing steel, glass and cypress tower that was raised last week in "Silo City," an area along the Buffalo River where several massive abandoned grain elevators are located.

The [bee colony](#) was living in the walls of a long unused outbuilding destined for rehabilitation. The bees were moved into Elevator B on June

10 and the honey from the existing hive was pressed and distributed among the designers and builders.

The new habitat's exterior hexagonal shapes are inspired by natural honeycomb, and its tubular design echoes the shape of the grain elevator silos that surround it. Elevator B is sited in a field adjacent to the historic "Marine A" grain elevator, built in 1925, which rises 196 feet from the shore of the Buffalo River.

The design and its function are described in detail with diagrams and drawings available here at [hivecity.wordpress.com/design/ ... e-2-schematic-design](http://hivecity.wordpress.com/design/e-2-schematic-design) .

Inside the tower is an innovative "bee cab" or bee elevator constructed of cypress and glass, which will actually house the colony and provide it with protection and warmth.

The bee cab typically will be in a raised position to allow visitors to step into the tower, look up and watch the colony through a glass window. The bees will enter the cab through holes near its top, about 10 feet above the ground in its raised position. The cab can be lowered to the ground to permit the [beekeeper](#) to attend to the health and safety of the bees.

Elevator B is a winning design in a student competition organized by the UB School's Ecological Practices Research Group. It involved four teams of young architects.

The competition, sponsored by Rigidized Metals Corporation of Buffalo, which owns the Silo City site, required teams of graduate and undergraduate architecture students to design habitats in which the entire "living body" of the colony -- thousands of bees and a huge honeycomb -- could live long and prosper.

The winning team is made up of five graduate architecture students in the UB school who say their intention was not only to design a structure to house the bees, but to offer a way to educate the public about bee work and its contribution to our ecological system.

Bees, of course, are under enormous environmental and physical stress, and are perhaps less well understood than they should be, although in his day, St. John Chrysostom wrote that the bee "is more honored than other animals, not because she labors, but because she labors for others."

The members of the winning team are Courtney Creenan, who graduated from UB in May with master's degrees in architecture (M.Arch) and urban planning (MUP); Scott Selin and Lisa Stern, each of whom graduated with an M.Arch in May, and Kyle Mastalinski and Daniel Nead, who will receive combined M.Arch and MUP degrees in 2013.

The participating teams were directed by Christopher Romano, UB clinical assistant professor of architecture, and Martha Bohm and Joyce Hwang, both assistant professors of [architecture](#). In 2010, Hwang famously designed and built an innovative structure to house bats and raise awareness of their enormous value to the ecosystem and of a fungal disease, white-nose syndrome, which so far has killed nationwide more than 1 million bats.

Provided by University at Buffalo

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