

Cuneo Hospital, 720 W. Montrose Avenue



Photo: Stacey Pfingsten, 2012

Overview:

When opened in 1957, Frank Cuneo Memorial Hospital was the most modern of hospitals, including a stunning lobby and operating rooms with patterned walls and floors of individually designed Romany-Spartan glazed tile walls. Architect Edo J. Belli introduced a new modernism to Roman Catholic architecture in Chicago, including St. Patrick's High School at 5900 W. Belmont and St. Joseph Hospital at 2900 N. Lake Shore Drive.

Cuneo Memorial Hospital demonstrates his whimsical yet thoughtful approach to hospital design, including a roof line that resembles an artist's palette. Belli combined lyricism with modern materials to create his own architectural style, one that departed ever so slightly from the rigid "Miesian" orthodoxy that dominated architectural expression at that time. Similar in design and execution, a visit to the chapel at St. Joseph Hospital provides a hint of what the original Cuneo interior was like. Cuneo was closed in July 1988 and was then converted to a children's shelter. The building has stood vacant and deteriorating for several years. Although a recent redevelopment plan for the entire campus was killed in early 2012 by community opposition, demolition, including demolition by neglect, remains a credible threat to Cuneo.

Cuneo Hospital
720 W. Montrose Avenue
Architect: Edo J. Belli
Date: 1957
Style: Modern

History:

Frank Cuneo Memorial Hospital, a 140-bed women and children's hospital, was dedicated by Cardinal Samuel Stritch in 1957 in a ceremony attended by Mayor Richard J. Daley. The hospital was built for the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, who also built Columbus Hospital at 2520 N. Lakeview. The hospital was endowed

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first by Frank Cuneo and then by his son John F. Cuneo, Sr. John Cuneo founded Cuneo Press and was chairman of the National Tea Company and founded Hawthorn-Mellody Farms Dairy. John's wife Julia Shepherd was the granddaughter of one of the founders of Chicago's Crerar-Adams Railway Supply Company. They bought Commonwealth Edison founder Samuel Insull's Vernon Hills home which was built in 1914 and designed by architect Benjamin Marshall of Marshall & Fox. It is now known as the Cuneo Mansion and Gardens. Cuneo had the interior of the Mansion painted with murals from Chicago Ecclesiological Muralist John Mallin, who also contributed murals to Belli's hospital projects. Edo J. Belli, who was born in Chicago 1918 and began architectural training while in high school, took a job with architects Holsman & Holsman in 1936. With their support, he enrolled in evening classes at Chicago's Armour Institute of Technology, graduating in 1939. He worked for Graham, Anderson, Probst & White and Perkins & Will before founding Edo J. & Anthony J. Belli with his brother in 1941. Edo's sons, Allan and James, later joined them, and in 1978 the firm was renamed Belli & Belli. James had worked with C.F. Murphy Associates. The firm elected to remain a relatively small family-owned operation specializing in Catholic ecclesiastical architecture. Belli died in Lake Forest, Illinois, in 2003.

Threat:

Although a large multi-use redevelopment project that would have destroyed Cuneo hospital was killed by local community opposition in 2012, the threat to the hospital still remains. Due to its proximity to the lakefront, the property is very desirable and could suffer the same fate as its sister institution, Columbus Hospital, which was demolished after 97 years of service for a condominium development.

Alderman James Capplemen (46th) has expressed interest in seeing the hospital adaptively reused and has embarked on a new community engagement and planning process. Public meetings will commence in the spring of 2012, at which residents and other stakeholders will be encouraged to express their vision for the site, including adaptive reuse for the former hospital building.



Recommendation:

Preservation Chicago urges the adaptive reuse of the 1957 Cuneo Hospital building. Its location and structure offers numerous reuse possibilities. Suggestions put forth by the community include an arts colony similar to the recently completed Arts Center Logan Square Avondale, workforce housing, as well as a first floor restaurant that could take advantage of park views.

