

The Case for CMU

Creative Use of Architectural CMU Delivers Form and Function for St. Clair Hospital

Four colors and three unit sizes of architectural block veneer provide aesthetics, functionality, and value.

Architectural concrete masonry—combined with innovative design and craftsmanship—has delivered in a big way on the recent expansion of Pittsburgh’s St. Clair Hospital, a vital healthcare provider with ties to the prestigious Mayo Clinic.

St. Clair’s outpatient volume grew by 130 percent from 2006 to 2018, making it the fastest growing hospital in Pittsburgh and driving the need for the creation of the 280,000-square-foot Dunlap Family Outpatient Center which opened its doors in the spring of 2021.



Architectural CMU dresses up the 280,000-square-foot Dunlap Family Outpatient Center, which opened in the spring of 2021.

FEATURED PROJECT

Dunlap Family Outpatient Center, St. Clair Hospital Pittsburgh, PA

CMU MANUFACTURER	York Building Products York, PA
CMU PRODUCT USED	Architectural Block
ARCHITECT	IKM Pittsburgh, PA
GENERAL CONTRACTOR	PJ Dick Pittsburgh, PA
MASON CONTRACTOR	MARSA, Inc. Pittsburgh, PA

The center puts all of the hospital’s outpatient services and procedures under one roof. The building includes:

- a floor that offers comprehensive diagnostic services, including lab, radiology, and medical imaging;
- a procedural floor offering 10 operating rooms for outpatient surgery;
- an endoscopy (GI) suite with six procedure rooms;
- a floor that houses clinical programs and multidisciplinary physician offices;
- shared waiting space with multiple seating options; and
- designated family consultation space that’s easily accessible.

The Dunlap Family Outpatient Center was designed by IKM, while PJ Dick served as the general contractor and MARSA, Inc. was the mason contractor (all companies based in Pittsburgh, PA). NCMA member York Building Products, York, PA, supplied the architectural block.

Architectural Block Provides a Beautiful, Durable, and Cost-Effective Solution

Tami Greene, IKM's project manager on the Dunlap center, and now a principal at the firm, said that architectural block veneer—in a carefully planned pattern of four different colors and three different size units—delivered aesthetics, functionality, and value.

“We wanted the center to blend with the neighborhood, which includes a nearby school and houses, and we also wanted the new facility to blend with and complement the existing buildings on the St. Clair Campus. The other buildings feature a lot of masonry, and generally have a beige or neutral palette. We also had to be concerned about cost, because the center itself is a very large undertaking, housing a wide range of very expensive medical equipment,” she said.

Initial planning for the project began in 2016. As designers considered their material options, they came across a building in Arizona which made use of several different sizes and colors of architectural CMU. They decided to use a similar approach on the front of the St. Clair project.

Planning and Preparation Are Keys to Success

Greene credits attention to detail and planning—in both the design and installation phases—as keys to the concept's success.

“We wound up with 55 percent of the architectural block being parchment, 15 percent arctic white, 15 percent putty, and 15 percent as a custom color that was designed to match the other buildings on the campus—and a combination of 4, 8, and 12-inch units. We worked to blend the rows. We tried to overlap our accent lines so that the patterns flowed naturally,” she said.

Designers devised “A” and “B” patterns in 10-by-40-foot wall sections. “Coordination of the patterns was a pretty



The Dunlap Family Outpatient Center puts all of the hospital's outpatient services and procedures under one roof.

large undertaking. We actually drew the patterns out for the whole building. And when construction was underway, the block was palletized in the patterns to make installation faster and minimize the chance of mistakes,” Greene said. Metal panels in blue and copper penny also helped tie the Dunlap center into the main hospital visually, she added, noting that the back of the building made use of standard size 8” x 8” x 16” architectural block.

“The colors, the different sizes, and use of the patterns allowed us to get the result we wanted. It worked out well for us in terms of both aesthetics and cost,” Greene said.

“The Dunlap Family Outpatient Center has been described as a bridge between St. Clair's proud past and bright future,” said Tim Dunlap, son of benefactors Anna and Edward Dunlap Jr., prior to the May 6, 2021 ribbon cutting for the facility. “Our family could not be more proud of the transition.”

Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf said in a video message delivered at the event that “during this past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us just how important our healthcare field is, and we need to ensure that we are keeping up with its changing demands. So thank you for putting the needs of your patients above everything else.”

And, thanks in part to durable, beautiful architectural concrete masonry, the Dunlap Family Outpatient Center will be doing that for years to come.

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