

To create the light boxes, 1 in.-wide horizontal LED strips were placed in selected window openings, with frosted plastic panels installed behind them on the interior.

Safety first is Rule Number 1 on the road. The same rule extends to pedestrians in a parking garage, but at one facility in Omaha, NE, *aesthetic appeal* was a pretty close second. Both rules were followed to the letter at the new, five-story Alegent Health, Bergan Mercy Hospital parking garage through the use of two different lighting systems: one system ensures safe passage on the stairwells and the other offers a visually stimulating light show for visitors to the hospital. Fluorescent lighting is used for the stairwells, while LED light boxes in selected window openings create the color-changing spectacle.

“Leaving the systems separate meant we now had a layered story: there is the light show; the stairwell lighting; and how they interconnect for the people using the stairway,” says lighting designer Kyle Pearson, KGP Design, Omaha.

It sounds complex, but the whirlwind installation came together in a mere 22 days last December, resulting in a vibrant holiday gift for the community. “I got a call around Thanksgiving. The client had been looking for a way to create a unique visual element for this new parking structure for over a

year. The design had been bogged down on a way to allow the staircase and the installation lighting to function independent of each other,” says Pearson. “I thought they were looking for a control system, but when we met it became clear they were looking for lighting design installation.

“Originally, they wanted to light the entire interior of the stairwell with one system, but then we would have to ‘interrupt’ the stairwell lighting for the light show and ‘interrupt’ the show to provide the stairwell lighting. To me, this wouldn’t seem to work well either as a stairwell *or* as a lighting installation.” Pearson was aware of other projects that relied on occupancy sensors to do this, but the effect ended up being “very disjointed”; he was also concerned about the glare that might result from this approach (a particularly sensitive issue given the fact that the parking garage serves a healthcare institution).

The question came down to “how do we accomplish both things: [provide] safe access and egress and a lighting show to draw people to the structure with something visual and comforting?” says Pearson. The answer was independent lighting systems.

BY PAUL TARRICONE

Two independent systems—one for safety, the other for visual impact—light a parking garage in Omaha, NE

COMBO PACK

Photos: Tom Kessler



People using the stairways get to experience the light show because the boxes are translucent, not opaque.

BUILDING THE BOXES

The key to devising the lighting scheme was to view the project in a different way, i.e., as a renovation rather than as new construction. Indeed, the window locations were already in place and the fluores-

cent stairway lighting had already been installed. “We looked at it like a retrofit. My suggestion was to turn the window openings into light/shadow boxes,” says Pearson.

The next step was client approval. “The head of facilities for Ale-

gent was willing to light some of the windows, and then the architect (Altus Architectural Studios, Omaha) picked the windows that would look right. With that, we were off and running,” says Pearson.

Approximately 29 of an available 142 windows were outfitted with the light boxes. The light boxes consist of horizontal Lightwild LED luminaire strips (1-in. wide and of varying lengths) mounted in the selected window openings, with a frosted plastic panel installed behind them on the interior to block direct view of the lights by those navigating the stairs. Seventy fixtures were required—generally two per window opening. The distance between the interior glass window and the plastic panel is only about 3 in., creating a sleek, streamlined box. “It was ultimately a simple solution that provided the signature visual impact the client wanted without compromising stairway safety.”

But Pearson is quick to note that the light boxes aren’t just for the enjoyment of drivers approaching the garage or those viewing it from the outside. “People on the stairways get to experience the show because the boxes are translucent, not opaque. It becomes a more organic, interactive project.”

20 TO COME

During the day, daylight enters the stairwell space; the light show begins at dusk. Thus far, three or four programs are running. The colors change slowly and each light box changes color separately. Altus Architectural Studios has also proposed the idea of themed shows, for



The fluorescent stairwell lighting and the LED light boxes function independently. The designer feared that using one system that relied on occupancy sensors would result in a “disjointed” look.

example, pink light for Breast Cancer Awareness Month; an illuminated fireworks display for the Fourth of July; and a “falling leaves” show to usher in autumn.

The hospital eventually plans to run about 20 regularly scheduled light-show programs, but reaching consensus among so many stakeholders has caused delays. Ironic, observes Pearson, in that it took far less time—just about three weeks—to create the design, itself. “No one believed we could meet the deadline, but three days before Christmas we stood in the snow congratulating each other.” 🙌

METRICS THAT MATTER

Alegent Health, Bergan Mercy Hospital Parking Garage Façade/Stairwell

Illuminance Level: 10 fc maintained

Fixture Types: 2

Number of Fixtures: 70 LED luminaires



About the Designer: During his 30-year career, Kyle G. Pearson, LC, Member IES (2003), Associate IALD, has designed lighting for architecture, performing arts, and television. Notable projects include Kenefick Park for Union Pacific Railroad, the 2002 U.S. Olympic Torch Relay Train, and the ABC Television broadcast of *St. Nicholas Circle-a Thomas Kincaid Christmas*. He holds a Master of Fine Arts in Lighting from the University of Texas at Austin.