



Company of the Month: AKF Group earns National Recognition Award for Columbia's Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Center

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Photo Credit: Pavel Bendov/ArchExplorer

New York, NY AKF Group has earned a National Recognition Award for exemplary engineering achievement in the American Council of Engineering Companies' (ACEC) 54th annual Engineering Excellence Awards (EEA) for its role in the relocation of Columbia University's Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Center (ADARC). The project also won a Diamond Award from ACEC New York, the highest honor bestowed locally.

Photo Credit: Pavel Bendov/ArchExplorer

ADARC is one of the world's largest private research facilities dedicated to the treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS. Its new location at Columbia University Irving Medical Center includes a biosafety level 3 (BSL3) laboratory, a highly controlled environment that requires negative air pressure to block virus transmission. Design also included supporting laboratories, conference rooms, offices, and a lobby atrium. Laboratories were designed for HIV/AIDS research, with optimum flexibility to adapt to scientific advancements and needs with minimal disruption. The laboratory's successful adaptation and seamless transition to accommodate a new need was proven

this past year as many ADARC scientists directed their attention to the testing, treatment, and prevention of COVID-19.

“The fight to stay safe while developing vaccines for infectious diseases has all of us working together, not just in research, but as a community” said Frank Angelini, AKF national science & technology practice leader.

AKF Group engineered the mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and fire protection systems to ensure compliance with stringent federal safety guidelines, protecting both occupants and the outside community from viruses. An interlocking door system and cascading air pressure system work together to maintain required air pressure and prevent release of contaminants. High-efficiency particulate air filtration devices filter exhaust air to ensure air exiting the building is virus-free. Advanced controls activate isolation dampers that close within seconds of a power outage to keep laboratory air pressure from going positive. These innovative engineering solutions facilitate scientific discovery and create a safe environment for the country’s leading virus researchers.

“This project illustrates how teamwork and open communication push a project to exceed client needs. CUIMC and ADARC provided input throughout the process to ensure the laboratory met their needs and complied with government regulations. Collaboration and effective engineering helped make the dream of flexible laboratories a reality” said AKF partner Jason Sylvain.

The project is eligible for additional ACEC honors as part of 173 entries this year representing engineering excellence throughout the world. Judging for the awards program—known industry-wide as the “Academy Awards of the engineering industry”—was conducted by a national 20-member panel of built-environment leaders, along with experts from government, media, and academia. Award criteria focused on uniqueness and originality, technical innovation, social and economic value, and generating excitement for the engineering profession. Recognition of all award winners including top winners will take place during the 2021 Virtual EEA Gala, to be held Thursday, June 17th, 2021.

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