



LI Exec. of the Month: Michael Mark, AIA, principal and owner of MDSA and partner/chief architect of NursePod

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Hicksville, NY Michael Mark is partner/chief architect for NursePod as well as the principal of Mark Design Studios Architecture (MDSA).

MDSA is a leading architectural design firm with an extensive portfolio of successful projects of educational, municipal and multi-family housing projects throughout the greater New York area, including new structures, building additions and renovations, capital improvements, bond referendum projects, parks and recreational facilities.

Most recently he and his team created NursePod, a modular structure that serves as a remote school nurse's office to protect students and school staff against COVID-19 spread. The units are constructed offsite and installed on a foundation, streamlining the process for building permits and

reducing onsite labor as well as the time needed for a traditionally constructed building. Three of the NursePods were installed at schools in the Glen Cove School District in March, allowing for the resumption of full-time instruction there.

We spoke with Mark about NursePod and his plans to offer them to camps and other businesses that serve kids.

Michael Mark (center) with Irene Yim, VP of development, MDSA, and Michael Scott, VP of construction, MDSA, outside the first NursePod installed at the Glen Cove School District. Credit NursePod.

NYREJ: The NursePod project is an innovative product. How did you come up with the idea?

Mark: Existing school buildings are not designed to be medical facilities. There's no ability to truly isolate a potentially infected student – certainly not for an airborne virus like COVID-19 – and building out those spaces in a school would be extremely costly and time-consuming. We developed NursePod to combine efficient construction methods in modular construction with innovative new technologies that are designed to protect against germs, viruses and bacteria. The result is a new cost-effective product that will become a critical infrastructure component for any school, camp or athletic facility.

NYREJ: What went into creating the NursePod to make it medically compliant?

Mark: We did extensive research into how COVID-19 works and incorporated recommendations from the CDC and ASHRAE to combine best practices. We also worked with numerous vendors and experts to incorporate a new rendition of building products that promote health and safety. This creates a new normal and improved medical infrastructure so that these facilities are prepared after COVID for other transmissible viruses, including influenza and stomach viruses that affect schools yearly.

Michael Mark and Irene Yim stand inside the NursePod reception area. The isolation rooms are behind them. Credit NursePod.

NYREJ: What are the key elements of the NursePod?

Mark: In addition to being outside the school building, which we think is critical, there are some important considerations. The NursePod includes two isolation rooms where kids can rest comfortably and away from other kids and nurse staff. The rooms are finished in microbicidal paint which kills germs on contact, including anything that is exhaled, coughed or sneezed. The rooms are

also equipped with exhaust fans, so anything that is airborne is expelled to the outside. The NursePod also gives nursing staff a comfortable space to work and includes all the facilities they need, including refrigeration, sink with anti-microbial lab counter and accessible bathroom. Putting the NursePod outside the school also lets the former nurses' office inside to be converted for alternate use.

NYREJ: Did you ever think, as an architect, that you would create a new product like this?

Mark: I believe in surrounding myself with talented, intelligent problem solvers who are driven to improve the world around us. As architects, designers, developers, and parents, we wanted to provide a way to allow schools to reopen in a way that is safe for children while reassuring parents that caregivers and educators are prepared in the event that anyone exhibits symptoms.

NYREJ: You're the architect of record for a number of Long Island School Districts. Did that help you develop NursePod?

Mark: Absolutely. We've designed cafeteria improvements, a Fitness & Wellness Center, and HVAC improvements in the Plainedge School District in North Massapequa, a fitness wing renovation in the Lawrence Public Schools, and the Activity & Athletic Center along with the Gold Star Stadium at Chaminade High School in Mineola among many other projects. Our experience with school projects is our calling card and we love working on projects that improve students' experiences. Over the past 25 years, we have developed a stellar reputation for professionalism, honesty, and creative problem solving. We work collaboratively with clients so that they are assured the aesthetics are as successful as the efficiency of the spaces we design, and that the goals of the project are met.

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