



Sunday November 15, 2009

R. Steven Lewis, NOMA President

Re: Acknowledgements for the NOMA Honor in Design Excellence Award, Won by AARRIS Architects at the NOMA Award Gala at the National Conference in ST. Louis Missouri, Saturday October 10, 2009

Dear Mr. Lewis,

I am writing this letter on behalf of AARRIS Architects and our design consultants as an expression of the deep joy we have experienced for having won the prestigious NOMA Honor in Design Excellence Award for the completion of the African Burial Ground National Monument (ABGNM). The AARRIS design team believes that the power of the project is generated by the sacrifices of the ancestors for which it stands. Our intent was to honor the lives of the free and enslaved Africans who were laid to rest at this site, and I believe receiving this award is evidence that, by the grace of God, we have achieved our objective.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and express my deepest gratitude to all of those who were involved in the design process including all of those who voted for our scheme early in the GSA competition selection process to win the commission in 2004. I must begin my acknowledgements with my esteemed colleague Rodney Leon for his conceptualization, ingenuity and leadership on our journey to materialize ABGNM.

We are indebted to the former Mayor David Dinkins who was active Mayor of New York City at the time and now Governor David Patterson (who was then Senator David Patterson) for their roles in stopping the construction of the annex to the General Services Administration (GSA) building that was originally planned for this lot. We commend the GSA and the National Parks Services for their contribution towards creating a steering committee of community activists who together with the GSA and the NPS lead the way towards getting Historical Landmark status for the lot and then its status as a National Monument.

Our greatest admiration goes to Dr. Michael Blakeley and his staff at Howard University for the exemplary work they have completed in unearthing the data that help us to understand more in the lives of the men, women, children and babies that were buried at this site.

We would be amiss if we did not mention some of the key personnel who were involved in the weekly design and construction meetings including the following:

Mark Dremel, General Services Administration (GSA), Project Manager  
Wendy Kalan, GSA, Project Manager  
Mildred Broughton, GSA, Contracting Officer  
Tara Morison, National Parks Services, Superintendent

Dennis Montagna, National Parks Services, Design Consultant  
Nada Cheiban, Parsons Brinkerhoff, CQM, for GSA  
Monica Aliaga Laud, AARRIS, Project Manager 2005 to 2008  
Elizabeth Kennedy, EKLA, Landscape Architect  
Melbourne Garber, Robert Silman Associates, Structural Engineer  
Domingo Gonzalez, Domingo Gonzalez Lighting Design, Lighting Designer  
Andrew J. Ciancia, Langan Engineering, Civil Engineer  
Gerald Palevsky, Fountain/Pool Design  
HRH, General Contractor  
Granite: Polycore (fabrication)  
U.S. Stone Settings (installation)

From this list I would like to single out and give special thanks to Mr. Domingo Gonzalez for his lighting design, donated to the project pro bono.

Finally, I would like to thank you, Mr. R. Steven Lewis, for all that you have done for NOMA. Since the arrival of past president James Washington, I have watched NOMA in five very short years, become a formidable professional organization. After building momentum for 30 plus years, it is living up to the standard that the founding members had envisioned. You, I believe, have furthered the organization towards becoming the top shelf organization that its members need, deserve and can continue to build. I am thankful to for the strides made by Marshall Purnell, former NOMA president, having also served as the first African American President of the American Institute of Architects, (AIA), 2008. I am also thankful for the synergy now being fostered by both organizations.

On a more personal note I must lastly and most importantly thank my beloved husband Patrick Denis for the sacrifices he has had made during the years of the design and construction process in support of our successful completion of the ABGNM.

I am especially honored to receive this design award in this First Year of Obama, as juror Rene Kemp-Rotan so eloquently wrote in this year's issue of the NOMA magazine. I dedicate this award to my two young daughters Elana and Julia, (ages 3 and 1). This is our gift to their generation and future generations, in our effort to "uplift the spirit and to contribute to the improvement of the human condition", (AARRIS' mission statement). I look forward to seeing the beautiful gifts their generation will bring to our world.

It was a particular honor for me to receive this particular design award, for this particular project, at this particular time. It was a life changing experience for me to share the explosive standing ovation that came at the end of the award presentation.

For the Ancestors:  
*For those who were NOT forgotten.*

Thank you from the depths of my soul,

Nicole Hollant-Denis, AIA, NOMA  
Principal