Netsch Lecture: Visions and Future Directions of the Last Four Miles Speakers

Maria Villalobos Hernandez

Villalobos is an Assistant Professor at IIT, Chicago. She holds a Master’s in Design Studies from Harvard Graduate School of Design, and a Ph.D. in Landscape Architecture from the École Nationale Supérieure de Paysage-Versailles. In 2017, she won first prize in the Venezuelan Architecture Biennale, and it was the first time a woman received this award. Villalobos serves on the Lincoln Yards Advisory Council, the Committee on Design for the Department of City Planning in Chicago, and as a core member of Dark Matter University. Villalobos is the recipient of the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture 2022 Excellence in Design Studio Teaching Award.



Iyana Simba

Iyana currently serves as the City Programs Director at the Illinois Environmental Council where she oversees advocacy, coalition building, aldermanic relationships and organizing related to environmental issues before the City of Chicago. Previously, she has served several roles at IEC including Clean Water Policy Director, Clean Water Advocate, and Intern. In her most recent role as Clean Water Policy Director, she oversaw policy development, coalition building, and advocacy related to water issues in Illinois. Iyana’s work continues to ensure water among other environmental issues are salient to both the public and decision makers.

Prior to working at IEC, she attended the University of Illinois at Chicago and graduated with honors with a degree in Public Policy and a Sustainable Cities minor.

Outside of her work, Iyana enjoys engaging in local politics, painting, hiking, and traveling. She is also a member of the Environmentalists of Color Network and the Chicago Urban League’s Metropolitan Board.

A person smiling for the camera

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Kimberly Fair

Kimberly Fair is the Policy Assistant for the Illinois Environmental Council. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Biological Sciences from DePaul University and later pursued her graduate degree in public policy. Kimberly works on urban agriculture, municipal water and food waste policy as well as coalition building within IEC’s community council.

Kimberly is passionate about educating youth and addressing socioeconomic inequality through an environmental lens.

A person with long hair and glasses

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Joel Brammeier

As Alliance for the Great Lakes president and CEO, Joel Brammeier oversees all aspects of the organization, leads a team of professionals across five locations, along with a base of more than 15,000 volunteers around the region dedicated to protecting clean water and building a sustainable future for the Great Lakes. Since joining the Alliance in 2001, Joel has become a leading voice on invasive species and water protection issues across the Great Lakes region. He has testified before Congress on invasive species solutions and advises state governors and Canadian provincial premiers on the implementation of the Great Lakes Compact, a binational agreement that ensures Great Lakes water stays in the basin. Prior to his work at the Alliance, Joel worked for the American Medical Association. Joel received his master’s degree from the University of Michigan’s School of Natural Resources & Environment and his bachelor’s degree from Valparaiso University.

A person smiling for the camera

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Thom Greene, Architect AIA

After 41 years, Thom Greene, Principal Architect of Greene & Proppe Design, is “hanging up his T-square” for greener pastures.

Greene, a graduate of Lawrence Tech University, began his career in Lansing, Michigan andmoved to Chicago in 1986. Greene established the Architecture & Interior Design firm in Edgewater in 1988 and has been making homes beautiful in Chicagoland and beyond ever since. Greene and his firm are known for their expertise in historic design, restoration & detail. They have been recognized with numerous awards including the prestigious Driehaus Landmark Preservation Council Award for the Rowhouses on Bryn Mawr. They have been published over 50 times in national architectural magazines and have been awarded 13 Chicagoland Good Neighbor Awards for restoring buildings & 12 Chicago Painted Ladies Awards. Greene was also awarded the State of Illinois AIA Daniel Burnham Award for Community Planning Service.

Devoted to acting locally, Greene’s firm has touched over 400 homes in Chicago. Greene is well known for offering his skills & talents, pro bono, to local initiatives throughout his career, including decades with Edgewater & Andersonville Chambers of Commerce & Development Committees and serving as an Aldermanic resource for numerous neighborhood projects. One of his first community projects 33 years ago was coordinating the planting of 200 trees along the Broadway corridor. He has spent the last 30 years working on creating a new Lakefront for Edgewater, with the Friends of the Parks “Last 4 Miles Project”. He is a founding member & current Officer of the Edgewater Historical Society. Greene created and implemented beautification efforts around town that are still enjoyed today: Andersonville and Bryn Mawr Streetscaping & Façade Design guidelines, the Historic District identifiers and the Swedish Water Tower.

Greene served on Mayor Daley’s Landscape & Streetscape Advisory Committee for 17 years. He was a driving force in the creation of National Historic District designations for Andersonville, Bryn Mawr and Lakewood Balmoral. His Kickapoo Nature Conservation project was awarded and featured on the Greenest Homes in America TV show.

Greene says: “It has been great to have a hand in creating our Edgewater & Andersonville that it is today. My special thanks to all of our clients who support & appreciate history and attention to detail and to all my community friends who actively participated in making Edgewater & our neighborhood a more beautiful place to live”.