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Images available for download [here](#)

The Chicago Architecture Center Celebrates 60 Years in April 2026  
*Anniversary commemorations include a birthday toast on Tuesday, April 21 and a retrospective exhibition tracking the CAC's evolution from grassroots activists to a world-class cultural center.*



This month, the Chicago Architecture Center (CAC), the leading organization devoted to celebrating Chicago as a center of architectural innovation, celebrates its 60th birthday. For the occasion, an anniversary exhibition titled [Currensts: 60 Years of the Chicago Architecture Center](#) will be unveiled [April 13, 2026](#) in the Center's first floor Orientation Gallery. The exhibition celebrates the spirit that defines the organization, charting the evolution from its grassroots efforts to save the historic Glessner House in 1966 to becoming a standard-bearing world class architecture center renowned for establishing Chicago as "the city of architecture."

On the evening of Tuesday April 21 at the Center, CAC President and CEO Eleanor Esser Gorski, AIA, will honor the people and personalities who make CAC a cherished institution. At 5:30pm, Esser Gorski will lead CAC founders, volunteer docents, staff, CAC members and the general public in a celebratory birthday toast. Esser Gorski will then invite guests to the lecture hall where she will moderate a panel discussion with some of the people involved in the establishment and long-term stewardship of the CAC. Panelists are expected to include original founder and inaugural trustee Wayne Benjamin, historian and early staff member Susan Benjamin, architect and early volunteer Cynthia Weese and Glessner House executive director and curator William Tyre. (Today, CAC and Glessner House operate as two independent organizations that maintain close ties). The public can register for free to attend CAC's April 21 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration [here](#).

"This is an opportunity for us to acknowledge our founders and reflect on all of the CAC's breakthrough initiatives that addressed current civic issues. These resulted in legacy programs that bring pride to our city today," said Esser Gorski. "It is also a time to talk about the exciting next chapters of the CAC."

During the celebration, Esser Gorski will announce details for the summer opening of a second Chicago Architecture Center location in the Loop. A satellite box office, tour center and retail store will open in the Marquette Building on South Dearborn Street, as a natural starting/stopping point for select tours among some of the earliest skyscrapers in Chicago.

What is today called the Chicago Architecture Center was born in April 1966 out of the efforts of a group of passionate, determined Chicagoans who took a stand to stop the demolition of the Glessner House, whose land was seen as more valuable than the building in the changing neighborhood. In the aftermath of saving and landmarking this treasured historic building, the loose-knit group – architects, lawyers, students, an alderman's wife – coalesced to share their passion for architecture with the public, conducting tours of Glessner House and "Chicago School" buildings in the Loop. CAC entered what was a fledgling preservation movement in Chicago in 1966 and helped galvanize the then emerging value for our signature historic architecture. Its targeted advocacy and broad educational programs built an ethic that has enabled CAC and its many partners in design and preservation to have sustaining impact.

Today the CAC is one of Chicago's leading cultural organizations, located on the Chicago riverfront, featuring nearly 10,000 square feet of exhibition space with views of a century of iconic skyscrapers. The CAC attracts hundreds of thousands of locals and international visitors annually for its expert, volunteer docent-led architecture tours by foot, bus, train and the world-famous Architecture River Cruise – initiated by CAC in 1983, partnered with First Lady since 1993 – voted the best boat tour in the United States by *USA Today*, as well as *Chicago Reader's* Best Tour for more than ten years. Every October, CAC's citywide Open House Chicago festival provides behind-the-scenes access to places of architectural, historical and cultural significance, drawing tens of thousands of cultural adventurers to Chicago's many neighborhoods.

Yearly, the CAC reaches more than 13,000 K-12 students through no-cost youth education programs including Girls Build!, We Build!, Teen Fellows and Engineering Fest. The CAC empowers adult residents to create positive change in their communities through the Chicago Community Planning Academy and is committed to serving under-represented communities in construction, engineering and design professions through the Trade Pre-Apprenticeship Experience. Through its youth and adult programs, the CAC inspires people to participate in building vibrant communities.

As part of the 60th anniversary year, recorded oral histories with some of the organization's founders will be archived in the collection of the Burnham Library at the Art Institute of Chicago.

In the spirit of the moment, CAC's 2026 "Designing Futures" gala, to be held September 16, 2026 at the Obama Presidential Center, will be 1966-themed.

*Currents: 60 Years of the Chicago Architecture Center*

April 13, 2026 - May 1, 2027

Orientation Gallery at Chicago Architecture Center

111 E Wacker Drive

312-922-3432

[www.architecture.org/visit-the-center/exhibitions/currents-60-years-of-cac](http://www.architecture.org/visit-the-center/exhibitions/currents-60-years-of-cac)

Chicago Architecture Center 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

Tuesday, April 21, 2026

5:30-7:30pm

Chicago Architecture Center

111 E Wacker Drive

312-922-3432

[www.architecture.org/events-programs/opening-night-currents-60-years-of-cac](http://www.architecture.org/events-programs/opening-night-currents-60-years-of-cac)

**About the Chicago Architecture Center**

The Chicago Architecture Center (CAC), a nonprofit celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2026, is dedicated to showcasing Chicago and ideas from around the world to inspire better living through design. A national leader in architecture and design education, the CAC offers tours, programs, exhibitions and more that are part of a dynamic journey of lifelong learning.

Its riverfront location is in the heart of the city, where Michigan Avenue meets the Chicago River, featuring nearly 10,000 square feet of exhibition space with views of a century of iconic skyscrapers.

The Center's Civic & Industry initiatives bring together residents, architects, policymakers and business leaders to shape a more equitable and well-designed city. Through a dynamic portfolio of in-school partnerships, out-of-school learning experiences, teacher professional development and community-based festivals including the annual Open House Chicago, the CAC Learning team engages more than 50,000 participants annually. This collective reach includes K-12 students, educators, families, professionals and lifelong learners, reflecting a comprehensive approach to education across age groups and settings. Committed to expanding access and representation in

construction, engineering and design professions, the CAC offers many programs at no cost. CAC programs for architecture and design professionals, enthusiasts and CAC members include talks with acclaimed authors and practicing architects, in-depth presentations on issues and trends in urbanism and classes unlocking subjects related to the built environment.

Proceeds from programs, tours and the CAC Design Store, as well as from grants, sponsorships and donations, support its educational mission. Visit [architecture.org](http://architecture.org) to learn more and follow @chiarchitecture and #chiarchitecture on social media.

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*Photo: Board of Trustees Chair Marian Despres introduces the first docent class at their graduation in 1971. Photo from the CAC archives.*