

REBRAND COMMENCEMENT

A university's signage is updated with a distinct look complementing its campus.

When St. John's University was looking to update and rebrand much of its signage across campus, one expert design firm joined up with other sign fabricators and installers to make certain these solutions would prove academic.

And for all the sign makers involved, their leap of faith here was rewarded with kudos for their dynamic-looking signage, which fits the school's message and complements the campus.

St. John's University is a Catholic school that plays host to

over 21,000 students at a variety of campuses (Manhattan, New York; Staten Island, New York; Paris, France; and Rome, Italy). However school officials were looking to rebrand a vast amount of signage at its campus sited in the heart of Queens, New York.

The University property here is encompassed with a wrought iron estate fence, stone entrances, and arches. "These traditional design elements would influence the sign design, which emulates this detailing while enhancing the University crest at



the top of each sign type,” says Barbara J. Martin, founder of KMA Design, one of the companies involved in this sign-rebranding project.

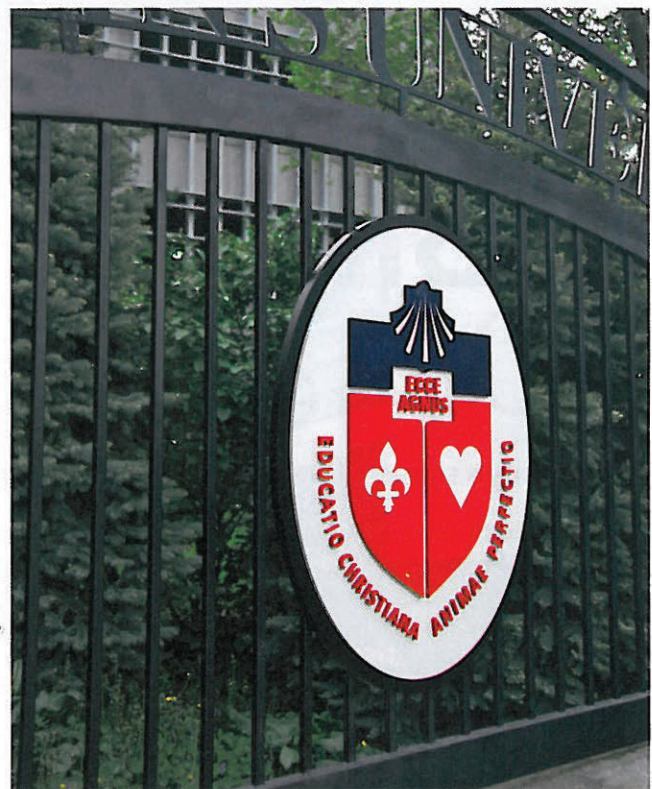
Located just outside Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Kerestes-Martin Associates, Inc. (KMA Design) has proven to be specialists in the field of architectural signage design since its incorporation in 1996. The firm currently features fourteen full-time employees, with each one boasting expertise in signage master planning and design.

The company specializes in large-scale projects and has an impressive resume of clientele from the healthcare, higher education, government, and entertainment sectors. (*Note:* Specific clients include: West Virginia University Healthcare, Adventist Health System, Stony Brook University, the University of Memphis, Hard Rock Casino Tulsa, and the NHL’s Pittsburgh Penguins.)

KMA was invited by RefinedSight, a New York-based company with an existing reputation at the school, to design and implement the exterior campus signage.

RefinedSight was in charge of overseeing project management and map art design on this project (as well as providing continuity from their previous experiences with the University) and was well aware of KMA’s expertise in designing higher education campuses throughout the country, so they asked them to provide design and planning expertise to their team.

“The design had to incorporate the updated branding stand-





The new signage had to meet the expectations of the facilities department for longevity and budget, security for clarity of procedure and directions, and marketing to reflect the new brand and enhance the student experience for the University through aesthetics and functionality.

ards (which modified the logo and fonts), as well as relate to the strong Christian values and superior reputation that the University offers,” says Martin.

Initially the team presented the client with three design concepts of different colors, materials, and imagery to consider. (Note: The most traditional version was selected not only for the University’s Queens campus, but also for their locations in Staten Island, Paris, and Rome.)

KMA Design executed the design for the on-site signage and arch details, preparing all construction documents and specifications. These drawings coincided with the locations and messages, which were planned for each sign type.

“The bidding documents used readily found products highlighting aluminum cabinetry and individual message strips for flexibility and interchangeability,” explains Martin. “Messages are reflective vinyl, providing high contrast to the black signs.

“They also maximize visibility at night without illumination

to aesthetically maintain the look and feel of the campus.”

The more-than-one hundred pieces of signage designed and built for this project included directional signs, street signs, gateway signs parking lot identification, and building names, installed along the campus at six gates situated around the perimeter of the campus.

“[These signs] are necessary to circulate visitors, students, and faculty to the appropriate parking lots, buildings, and departments,” explains Martin.

Prior to being awarded the project, KMA proactively designated the most experienced of its staff members for work on it. These consisted of project managers, signage and graphic designers, and planners best suited and experienced in higher education campuses (particularly Catholic private institutions).

According to Martin, the main challenges in the design process (like most of its other projects) turned out to be satisfying the needs of a variety of end-users. “The design had to meet



the expectations of the facilities department for longevity and budget, security for clarity of procedure and direction to appropriate parking areas, and marketing to reflect the new brand and enhance the student experience for the University through aesthetics and functionality,” she says.

The new signage was fabricated over the course of four months by Big Apple Visual Group of New York City, who utilized the SignComp™ system for the main structure of the directional signage and customized the sign headers and university crest to meet the design details and specifications of the project.

While fabrication did not present any significant challenges for the in-ground signage, Martin states that the most difficult sign types turned out to be the addition of the new crest to existing metal arches and gates.

“These efforts required verification of existing materials and dimensions and required a synthesis of old and new that had to blend seamlessly,” she says, “so as to not appear as an afterthought.”

The combination of fabricators and designers was able to achieve a successful end-result without the aid of existing architectural drawings and dimensions.

Working closely with Big Apple Visual Group, the KMA design team matched materials and colors for the new work to enhance the existing campus environment.

The directional, gate/entrance, parking, and street signage were installed just in time for graduation that spring.

The project was phased in rapid succession. KMA started with installing the gateway signage first, followed by the directional, street, and parking, and concluding with the building identification signage.

“This year’s brutal winter added a few weeks delay on foundations, but the project was kept on track and finished to meet the deadlines put forth by the University,” says Martin.

Today the new, rebranded signage crafted by these sign companies and found throughout the St. John’s Queens campus of St. John’s University is an enticing algorithm of how sign experts from various backgrounds can collaborate to arrive at scholarly, academic solutions. **SB**