



# CLASS A SIGNS



The triangle logo of the Patricia Stevens College symbolizes wellness, a philosophy of stress management and healthful living that the college emphasizes. The triangles in the identity signs are of Perlatto marble, mounted over saw-cut letters of chrome-plated brass.

Room and department identification signs, 3x9-in. and 4x12-in. respectively, are a twist on the traditional rectangular markers. A familiar sub-surface screen-printed rectangle is surface-mounted on a custom-shaped holder of chrome-plated brass. The marble triangles were sandblasted with their larger counterparts, and infilled with the same shade of teal. If the signs need to be changed, replacing the acrylic plaques will be inexpensive.

**W**HEN THE PATRICIA STEVENS COLLEGE moved to prime St. Louis office space, it wanted a Class A look to match its Class A site. The college administrators, in an effort to economize, decided to bypass a designer for the sign program. Luckily for the college, a dedicated design firm wouldn't let them.

The Henderson Group, St. Louis, had designed the sleek interiors for the school's offices in Forsythe Plaza, a glittering office tower across the street from the city's famous Union Station. Seeing the signage drawings sent back by a local fabricator, the design firm stepped in.

"They were poor designs," said Greg Youngstrom, a Henderson Group graphic designer. "It was a real bargain-basement sort of look." The room signs the fabricator had

proposed were simple screen-printed plaques, and a new college logo did not translate well into both two- and three-dimensional applications for stationary and signs.

The Henderson Group asked the college to design its logo and signs for a lowered fee. "We didn't want some stunning interiors to have some ugly signs," Youngstrom said. "We just wanted to do a good job and have the interiors and graphics work well together."

Dagmar von Tress, the projects interior designer, had given the school a crisp, modern interior. The Patricia Stevens College, established in 1947 as part of a national chain of modeling schools, is now an accredited business college for women, offering training in eight fields including interior decorating, secretarial work, and journalism. The college wanted its new quarters to reflect its emphasis on professionalism.

"We feel we're a more sophisticated approach to the business college solution than most," said Richard Harvey, secretary of the college. "Schools of this type are traditionally in Class B or Class C facilities. We wanted Class A."

Youngstrom worked to complete that professional image with the signage. The college's original logo had incorporated a triangle, the "wellness triad," symbolizing Patricia Stevens's philosophy of preparing its students mentally, spiritually, and physically. Von Tress had used a diamond motif extensively in her designs: the marble entryway floor is paved with a diamond pattern, and lighted ceiling coves are diamond shaped. Youngstrom saw that

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## Prime materials at a reasonable cost

the triangle and diamond motifs reinforced each other.

He revamped the triangle, combining it with simple type for a logo that works as well in print, or blind-embossed on fine stationery, as it does in three dimensions. The graphic color palette comes from the interior, where teal dominates. He then picked up materials for the signs, creamy marble and chrome, from the floors and furniture.

The materials are common, but not inexpensive. While Youngstrom might have wished for a bigger budget ("I'd love to have had a marble piece to etch and infill with metal," he said), he didn't specify the cheapest materials possible. Aluminum could have replaced chrome-plated brass; plastic might have mimicked Italian marble. But the college, Youngstrom said, preferred a smaller, more elegant sign system to a larger one with cheaper materials.

The entire program — 16 department and classroom signs, a desk sign for the receptionist, and two major identity signs, cost \$5000, according to the fabricator. However, the designer's cut-rate fee added little to that price. And for less than many buyers spend on one monument sign, the Patricia Stevens College got a one-of-a-kind package that matched its interiors.

The majority of the cost went for the 3/8-in. brass saw-cut letters and rules for the two identity signs. Each piece was hand-cut, ground, filed, polished, and chrome-plated. The letters are pin-mounted beneath triangles of 3/4-in.-thick Perlatto marble, sandblasted and infilled with a custom shade of teal.



The desk plaque for the receptionist is made of a block of solid brass, milled in front and plated with chrome. The acrylic name bar attaches to the milled rectangle with magnets, so its surface is flush with the chrome. Though the triangle pattern is repeated on the sides, the sign uses no marble. Because of the amount of brass used, it is the most expensive of the identification signs.

Marble floors, unusual light fixtures, and an art collection distinguish the interiors of the woman's business college. The school is on the fourth floor of the newly renovated Forsythe Building in downtown St. Louis. "We're in a vital area," said the school's secretary, Richard Harvey. "There are a lot of part time employment opportunities across the street [at St. Louis' Union Station]. Plus it makes for an exciting student union."



Less spectacular than the identity signs, but no less noticed, are the room identifiers. Often the most boring of signs, at Patricia Stevens they stand out because they're designed to be noticed. Youngstrom used subsurface-printed acrylic bars — the humblest of materials. But he mounted them on plaques of 1/8-in. chrome-plated brass, surmounted by miniature marble triangles. Instead of the bargain basement, Patricia Stevens got the designer studio.

But only because the Henderson Group cared enough about its interiors to ask for the signage job. "It's not normally the way we work," Youngstrom said. "We stuck our noses in to make the thing work a little better." ■

**PROJECT**  
Patricia Stevens College, St. Louis

**DESIGN**  
The Henderson Group, St. Louis;  
Gregory Youngstrom, Graphic Designer;  
Dagmar von Tress, Interior Designer

**FABRICATION**  
Engravings Unlimited Inc., St. Louis

**PHOTOGRAPHY**  
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