

Team Consistency is Key for Successful MEP

Chipman Design Architects and **KEA Engineers** defy the odds to bring Chick-fil-A to Queens, New York in February 2021.



Grand Central, NYC

Chicago-based architectural firm, Chipman Design Architects (CDA), is no stranger to the restaurant sector. Founded in 1979, CDA has completed architectural design for some major restaurant players like Shake Shack, Sbarro and Noodles & Company. However, in 2011, CDA partnered with a true restaurant titan, Chick-fil-A, to bring the “fast-casual” restaurant to downtown Chicago.

By 2016, Chick-fil-A was growing its presence to the New York City market. CDA needed to team with a local MEP engineer for a wave of new projects. Industry veteran and CDA Account Manager, Jefferson Koo, was heavily involved in the early stages of the MEP consultant interviewing process. “I think the biggest pain point was working with some MEP partners that didn’t have the right mindset. They were not open to understanding the client’s needs.” For these projects, Chick-

fil-A and CDA were looking for an MEP consultant to be a real partner. This MEP partner needed to have the practical experience necessary, be open to learning new processes and have the right attitude.

Ultimately, Chick-fil-A and CDA named KEA Engineers as their trusted MEP partner. Koo recalls, “The reason why Chick-fil-A chose KEA and continues relations with KEA is because they see depth to the company.”

For Chick-fil-A, that depth means open dialogue and team consistency. “The benefit of working with KEA is that there’s clear and honest communication as far as expectations,

PROJECT STATS

- **Project Title:** Chick-fil-A, Jackson Heights (Queens, NY)
- **Address:** 40-27 82nd Street, Elmhurst, NY 11373
- **Opened** February 2021
- **“Fast Casual” Restaurant**
- **5,200 Square Feet**
- **One Story**
- **Unique Feature:** Dual entrances on two different streets
- **First in-line urban location in the Queens borough**



THE CHALLENGE

KEA came to the table on a very complex store with very little information. I would say given that context, KEA came through with flying colors.”

— JEFFERSON KOO

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timing, schedule, manpower, etc.” said Koo. “The consistent team players, like Brandon Aiese as the project manager and mechanical team lead; Andrew Warner, leading up plumbing and Mike D’Andrea leading electrical; these guys are a huge asset for KEA.” This open communication strategy and consistency in project team means carrying institutional project knowledge forward and not needing to restart the conversation each time. The KEA project team was onboarded and off and running in no time.

One project the KEA Chick-fil-A team is particularly proud of is the 82nd Street, Jackson Heights, NY location. This location is the first urban in-line location in the Queens borough and has a unique feature: dual entrances on two different streets. This feature, designed pre-pandemic, ended up being conducive to business in this COVID world. One entrance serves off-the-street customers, who can



TEAM WORK

...Because of how well KEA is learning and growing and becoming even better with each store; it’s reflective of all of us.”

– JEFFERSON KOO

purchase food and dine in or take away. The other entrance is delivery focused, serving third party delivery companies such as Uber Eats, DoorDash, and Seamless.

However, the Jackson Heights location wasn’t all strokes of good fortune. It was a challenging project from many perspectives. “This was a ground up building that the landlord was developing with their own architectural and engineering team,” said Koo. Partnering with an existing A&E team meant more coordination from KEA Engineers. The existing team had to modify many of their assumptions regarding the mechanical, electrical and plumbing services, which threatened productivity along the way.

KEA Project Manager, Brandon Aiese recalls “The existing Jackson Heights A&E team had their own ideas about utility service. There was a lot of coordination with the landlord and the landlord’s contractor to get what we needed in order

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Image of Prototypical Chick-fil-A store

ABOUT CHIPMAN DESIGN ARCHITECTS

- www.chipman.design
- Four Locations: Chicago (Corporate), Los Angeles, Atlanta and New York
- Established in 1979
- A third-generation family-owned business, currently led by Lauren Chipman
- Registered in Chicago as a Woman Owned Business
- 100+ Full-Time Staff
- Licensed in all 50 states
- Chipman Design has a proven track record of extraordinary design and is recognized throughout the industry for its expertise in creating engaging and future-facing retail environments.



Image of Prototypical Chick-fil-A store



COMMUNICATION

The benefit of working with KEA is that there's clear and honest communication as far as expectations, timing, schedule, manpower, etc."

– JEFFERSON KOO

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to satisfy Chick-fil-A's project goals." One vital factor that needed to be addressed early on was an all-electric kitchen service, a feature unique to Chick-fil-A restaurants nationwide. KEA's foresight and proactive coordination on this matter prevented project delays.

On top of coordination issues, a growing pandemic shuttered all nonessential construction in the entire State of New York for several months. The KEA team, as well as the architect and structural engineer, had to file a special exemption status to continue working on the Chick-fil-A project. Despite these circumstances, this Queens Chick-fil-A location opened in February of 2021, and has since been very well-received.

Chipman Design Architects attributes the project success, in part, to the partnership with KEA Engineers. "KEA has shown a proper mindset: one of being open to learning and growing with us as the architect, and with our client [Chick-fil-A]." Jeff Koo said. "At the end of the day, KEA takes a lot off my plate. I feel a certain sense of relief in working with them." Koo concludes.

KEA Engineers is grateful for the ongoing partnership with Chipman Design Architects and is happy to be a part of the Chick-fil-A team. More opportunities are presenting themselves every day and KEA looks forward to many more years of successful CDA partnership. ■



MINDSET

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– JEFFERSON KOO



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