

Chicago Architect

AIA Chicago // Linda Searl, FAIA, 2024 AIA Chicago Lifetime Achievement Award Winner

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SPRING 2025

**Honoring Linda Searl, FAIA,
for a Lifetime of Achievement // 30**

**+ Celebrating 15 Years of the
Bridge Mentorship Program // 38**

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Dear Members and Colleagues,

I am delighted to introduce the spring issue of *Chicago Architect* magazine — the first issue of 2025 and my first as your new chapter president. I want to extend my gratitude to **Lynda Dossey, AIA**, for her exceptional leadership, mentorship, and service as president in 2024. It is truly an honor and privilege to step into this role and serve our community, building on the strong foundation of leadership, innovation, and collaboration that defines our chapter.

We began the year with the chapter board, the Foundation board, and our staff convening for our annual retreat to discuss strategy, alignment, and collaboration for each board's strategic plans. With a focus and effort to further engage members and cultivate volunteers, we also hosted our third annual Volunteer Fair this January. Then, in February, members from AIA Illinois and AIA Chicago traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate in the annual AIA Leadership Summit, followed by Advocacy Day on Capitol Hill. We look forward to sharing more details from this annual gathering of chapter leaders from around the country in our next issue.

2023 marked the completion of our last strategic plan, with the board of directors turning our attention in 2024 toward creating the next iteration to guide our work. The new 2025-2027 plan builds upon the chapter's mission and vision statements, with a strong focus on five key topics: advocacy, membership, honors and awards, education, and continued financial stability. This strategic plan is *your* plan. It reflects our mission to celebrate your impact, promote learning, and advocate for a thriving architectural community. We heard your valuable feedback through the member survey, and we're excited to serve you better by addressing your needs and priorities.

Within this issue, we explore several key topics that are directly related to our new strategic plan and the mission and vision of the chapter. Our cover story uplifts the impact of **Linda Searl, FAIA**, recipient of AIA Chicago's 2024 Lifetime Achievement Award. For more than 50 years, Linda has been a groundbreaking architect, mentor, and role model. Honoring our members' contributions is one of the most important ways AIA Chicago continues to raise the bar for the profession, so I hope you will take a moment to read writer Taylor Moore's career-spanning profile of Linda.

The second feature in this issue celebrates a milestone for one of our chapter's signature programs: Bridge. This widely known mentorship program began at the grassroots level and continues to have such a strong impact not only in our local community but also as a model for other chapters nationwide. As guest editor **Carl Sergio, AIA**, explains, participation is at an all-time high, demonstrating the mission-driven role of AIA Chicago members in mentoring the next generation of architects.

Also included in this issue is an interview between **Jen Masengarb, Assoc. AIA**, executive director, and **Evelyn Lee, FAIA**, the 101st president of AIA, focusing on Evelyn's unique background, professional expertise, and the board's vision for the organization she now leads. Together, with an update from **Eric Klinner, CAE**, executive vice president of AIA Illinois, these articles showcase the importance of collaboration with our state and national counterparts on critical advocacy issues that impact us here at home.

We hope you will enjoy this issue and the highlights of you, our members, as well as the many great ways in which we're continuing to amplify your voice and advocate for you and the profession. I also invite you to read our strategic plan, which was previewed at our Annual Meeting in December, at AIACHicago.org/StrategicPlan.

I am looking forward to a significant year for the chapter and Foundation and welcome you to come be a part of all AIA Chicago has to offer.

Jason Golub, AIA
2025 AIA Chicago President
president@aiachicago.org

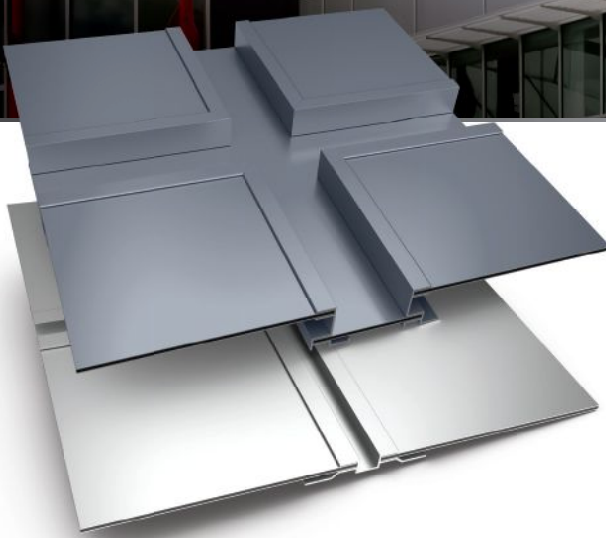


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▲ ON THE COVER

Harbert Cottage designed by Searl Lamaster Howe. COURTESY OF SEARL LAMASTER HOWE

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Taylor Moore is a journalist and writer in Chicago who specializes in investigative journalism and feature writing, documenting hidden histories, subverted narratives, broken systems, and people fighting for change. Find her profile of AIA Chicago's 2024 Lifetime Achievement Award winner, Linda Searl, FAIA, on page 30.



Carl Sergio, AIA, NOMA, has 15 years' experience across firms from the smallest to the largest, across all phases of design and construction, and through many market sectors and project typologies. As guest editor for this issue, he highlights AIA Chicago's Bridge Mentorship Program — which he has co-directed for nine years — in a special feature on page 38.

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BOARD UPDATES

AIA Chicago Membership Elects 2025 Board of Directors

In an election that saw unprecedented member engagement, AIA Chicago seated its 2025 board of directors with overwhelming support from the membership.

Most notably, voter participation surged by 69 percent compared to 2023, signaling growing involvement from the chapter's membership. The voting demographic reflected a robust cross-section of the architectural community, with licensed architects (AIA) comprising 71 percent of voters, followed by Fellows (FAIA) at 13 percent, Associate members at nine percent, and Emeritus members at seven percent.

The newly elected board continues to advance AIA Chicago's commitment to diversity and leadership development. Female representation has reached a historic high of 65 percent, marking a steady increase from 57 percent in 2023 and 48 percent in 2022. Additionally, 30 percent of board members identify as coming from racial or ethnic minority groups, while 35 percent serve as firm owners or executives.

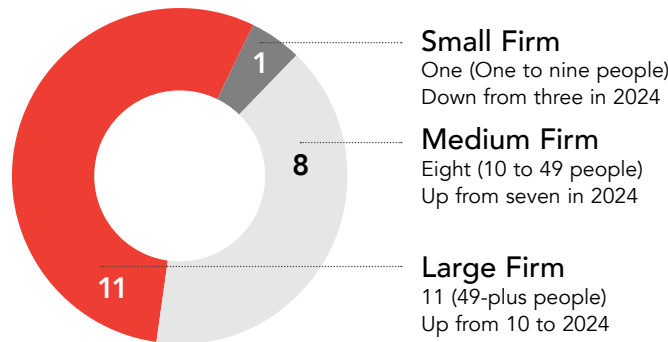
The board's composition also reflects the chapter's broad representation across practice sizes. Large firms (49-plus employees) slightly increased their presence with 11 representatives, while medium-sized firms (10 to 49 employees) maintained strong representation with eight members.

The election process, which ran from December 9-12, 2024, followed an open nomination period in September, when all members in good standing were eligible to participate. The results were announced following the chapter's virtual Annual Meeting on December 9, setting the stage for new leadership initiatives in 2025.

AIA Chicago is encouraged by this growth and stands poised to make an even greater impact in the architectural community throughout 2025 and beyond. With strong membership support and diverse leadership in place, the chapter is well-positioned to advance its mission of serving both the profession and the greater Chicago community through innovative programming, advocacy, and educational initiatives.

2025 AIA Chicago Board of Directors Composition by Firm Size

The breakdown of firm size is as follows:



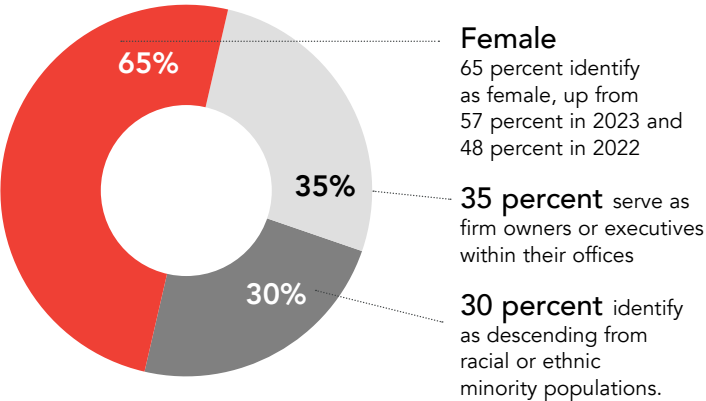
AIA Chicago Mission

AIA Chicago champions members by celebrating their impact, promoting learning, and advocating for a thriving architectural community.

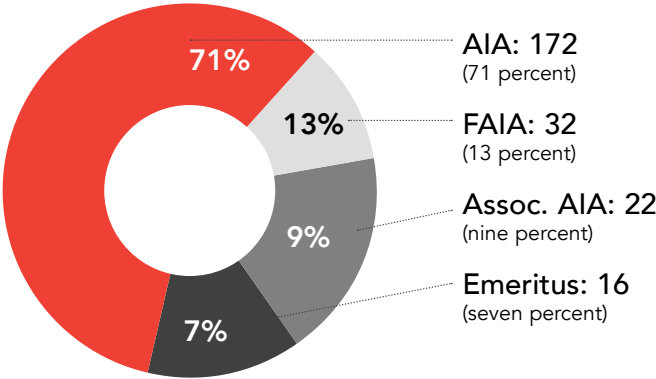
AIA Chicago Vision

Fostering a culture of design excellence for equitable, sustainable places and spaces.

**2025 AIA Chicago Board of Directors
Composition by Gender**



AIA Chicago Member Voter Breakdown



Elected 2025 AIA Chicago Board of Directors



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AIA CHICAGO CHAPTER REPORT



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The AIA Chicago board also includes three delegates from the AIA Illinois board of directors. These individuals are appointed by AIA Illinois and are not voted on by AIA Chicago's membership.



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Principal, Studio ARQ

Working in late 2024, the 2025 AIA Chicago board of directors Nominating Committee was composed of the following individuals:

Lynda Dossey, AIA – President 2024, AIA Chicago
Jason Golub, AIA – President-Elect 2024, AIA Chicago
Mindy Viamontes, AIA – Past President, AIA Chicago
Catherine Baker, FAIA – Fellows Committee Chair, AIA Chicago; Board President 2018, AIA Chicago
P.K. “Trish” VanderBeke, AIA – Trustee, AIA Chicago Foundation; Board Director 2007-2008, AIA Chicago
Elizabeth Cisneros Tlaxcala, Assoc. AIA – Communications Chair, Arquitectos
Emmanuel Garcia, AIA – Immediate Past President, Arquitectos
James Holland, AIA – President, I-NOMA (Illinois Chapter, National Organization of Minority Architects)
Randy Guillot, FAIA – AIA Fellow

PRESIDENTIAL CITATION



Janeen Harrell, AIA, with Lynda Dossey, AIA.



Breah Page, AIA, with Lynda Dossey, AIA.

Chicago Leaders Honored for Advancing Women in Architecture with Presidential Citation

In a year marked by significant milestones for women in architecture, AIA Chicago has recognized two outstanding leaders who have helped shape the profession's future and served the institute. **Janeen Harrell, AIA**, and **Breah Page, AIA**, have been awarded the 2024 Presidential Citation for their transformative work in advancing equity and leadership within the architectural community.

The prestigious honor, bestowed by AIA Chicago President **Lynda Dossey, AIA**, acknowledges their exceptional stewardship of the AIA Women's Leadership Summit in Chicago and their broader contributions to the profession. Their selection reflects the chapter's commitment to recognizing leaders who drive meaningful change in the industry.

Harrell's journey exemplifies the evolution of architectural leadership. Over the past decade, she has balanced establishing her own practice with extensive service at state and national AIA levels. Her dedication to sustainable design through the AIA 2030 commitment goals demonstrates how emerging leaders can simultaneously pursue professional excellence and industry advancement.

Page's impact in 2024 extended beyond the AIA Women's Leadership Summit through her pivotal role as chair of the Chicago Women in Architecture (CWA) 50th Anniversary Committee. Under her guidance, CWA's legacy was celebrated through an ambitious program of events, including panels, walking tours, and an exhibition at the Chicago Architecture Center that connected the organization's history to its future.

"These two leaders embody the mission and vision of AIA Chicago," reflected Dossey. "Their tireless efforts have not only showcased Chicago on a national stage but have also fostered a culture of inclusivity, design excellence, and equity."

The Presidential Citation, awarded annually at the AIA Chicago president's discretion, recognizes individuals whose service to the chapter and profession exemplifies exceptional dedication. In a chapter representing more than 4,000 licensed architects, emerging professionals, students, and allied professionals, Harrell and Page's selection highlights the growing influence of women leaders in shaping the future of architecture in Chicago and beyond.

PHOTO BY BOB. WITH SARAH ELIZABETH LARSON

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE

Community Builders and Women’s Advocates Honored with AIA Chicago’s Distinguished Service Award

PHOTO BY BOB. WITH SARAH ELIZABETH LARSON



Members of Chicago Women in Architecture and the Chicago Women in Architecture Foundation.



Grace Rappe, AIA, and Anh Pahn, AIA, representatives from Chicago Women in Architecture and the Chicago Women in Architecture Foundation.

PHOTO BY BOB. WITH SARAH ELIZABETH LARSON



Jonathan Kelley and Chelsea Ridle, recipients of the 2024 Distinguished Service Award.

In a celebration of architecture’s power to transform communities and advance equity, AIA Chicago has named two recipients of its 2024 Distinguished Service Award.

The honorees — **Jonathan Kelley** and **Chelsea Ridley** of **Lawndale Pop-Up Spot**, along with **Chicago Women in Architecture (CWA)** and its **Foundation (CWAF)** — represent diverse approaches to strengthening Chicago’s architectural landscape.

Reimagining Community Spaces in North Lawndale

Kelley and Ridley’s work through the Lawndale Pop-Up Spot exemplifies how architectural innovation can catalyze neighborhood revitalization. Their initiatives, including the ambitious Reimagining 16th Street project and the Chicago Sukkah Design Festival, have created new models for community engagement through design.

“Their exceptional leadership in blending architecture and community building demonstrates the profound influence of design on creating resilient and inclusive neighborhoods,” noted **Peter Wojtowicz, AIA**, vice president of honors and awards at AIA Chicago.

Five Decades of Advancing Women in Architecture

The recognition of CWA and CWAF comes at a particularly meaningful moment, as CWA celebrates its 50th anniversary of championing women in the profession. Under the 2024 leadership of CWA President **Anh Pham, AIA**, and CWAF Board Chair **Grace Rappe, AIA**, these organizations have evolved to meet contemporary challenges while maintaining their foundational mission.

The organizations’ recent initiatives, such as the Ladders to Leadership program, have produced tangible results in advancing women into leadership positions. Additionally, the Gertrude Lempp Kerbis Scholarship continues to support the next generation of women architects.

Sara Beardsley, FAIA, director of the AIA Chicago board of directors, emphasized the organizations’ lasting impact: “CWA and CWAF’s influence over the past five decades has been extraordinary. Their steadfast commitment to mentoring, career development, and advocacy has transformed the landscape of architecture for women and inspired countless professionals.”

The Distinguished Service Award, established in 1955, reflects AIA Chicago’s commitment to recognizing those who advance excellence in architecture through policy, projects, or public engagement.

2025-2026/2027 AIA Chicago and AIA Chicago Foundation Strategic Plans

For the first time, AIA Chicago and the AIA Chicago Foundation have aligned their visions and simultaneously launched strategic plans for 2025-2026/2027, marking a pivotal moment of cohesive purpose.

The AIA Chicago Foundation's first-ever strategic plan concentrates on empowering "change-makers" through refined scholarships, awards, and grants, bolstered by robust fund development, strengthened partnerships with the Chapter, enhanced marketing and communication efforts, and proactive board governance.

AIA Chicago's strategic plan focuses on enriching member experience through Knowledge Communities and Affinity Groups, amplifying its advocacy efforts through a formalized committee structure and enhanced member outreach, growing and engaging its membership through data-driven analysis, ensuring equitable and relevant honors and awards programs, and ensuring long-term financial stability.

AIA Chicago Foundation Strategic Plan

1. Scholarships, Awards, and Grants

- 1.1 Develop a framework for defining "change-maker" that allows the Foundation to refine the current scholarships and awards criteria.
- 1.2 Revise the application for each award and scholarship offered to align with the framework developed for the definition of "change-maker." Revise the evaluation criteria for each award and scholarship.
- 1.3 Define the roles and responsibilities of jury chair, jury members, and AIA Chicago Chapter staff for each award/scholarship or grant.
- 1.4 Increase the number of applicants to each award/scholarship twofold by Q4 2026.
- 1.5 Develop a process for considering proposed future awards, scholarships and grants.

2. Fund Development

- 2.1 Develop such policies and processes to guide acceptance of sophisticated giving to present to board for approval.
- 2.2 Develop a funding strategy to ensure funds are available to support all foundation projects.

- 2.3 Strengthen partnership with the Chapter by determining clear, established responsibilities, obligations, and activities within the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) where the Foundation and Chapter can work together to drive the mission of the Foundation by Q4 2026.

3. Marketing and Communications

- 3.1 Develop and implement a communications toolkit training program so trustees feel comfortable using the toolkit by year two.
- 3.2 Create a plan to promote the AIA Chicago Foundation honorees highlighting their professional successes and impact to implement in year two.

4. Board Governance and Development

- 4.1 Create an inventory of trustees' present skill sets and a plan for renewing the "skills inventory" with each new board by year's end.
- 4.2 Create a trustee's notebook that clearly exposit the board structure, trustees' roles and responsibilities, and an onboarding/off-boarding process.
- 4.3 Review and align AIA Chicago Foundation's Articles of Incorporation with the mission and vision statements.

AIA Chicago Strategic Plan

5. Education

- 5.1 Establish a Charter for Knowledge Communities (KC) and Affinity Groups (AG) that identifies their respective missions and Key Success Factors.
- 5.2 Establish a framework for each KC and AG to provide relevant and engaging programs for all members.
- 5.3 Update approaches to teaching to optimize how readily learners can implement learning objectives into work or practice.
- 5.4 Develop methodology for evaluating program effectiveness.

6. Advocacy

- 6.1 By Q1 2026, restructure and formalize the Advocacy Committee, Task Force, and

other subcommittees and reevaluate the current Decision Tree process to clarify the volunteer and staff workflow and identify priorities.

- 6.2 Develop the systems to facilitate regular/quarterly communication with/to members, partner organizations, and other large city AIA chapters by EOY 2026.
- 6.3 Develop the Charter, including Mission and Vision statements for the EDI Affinity Group, and continue to grow, develop, and enhance the impact of this Affinity Group.


7. Membership

- 7.1 Increase new Architect by 0.5 percent and Associate membership by one percent over the next three years.
- 7.2 Increase engagement of existing membership through data-driven analysis.

8. Honors and Awards

- 8.1 Implement processes to ensure the Awards Program is equitable for AIA Chicago members and their firms and that the Awards program is relevant to their work.
- 8.2 Revamp the current Decarbonization Award to better recognize AIA Chicago's member achievements and innovations in sustainable design excellence.
- 8.3 Recognize AIA Chicago members who contribute to award-winning and/or published projects. Recognize AIA Chicago members who go above and beyond in service to the chapter.

9. Sponsorship and Finance

- 9.1 Concurrent with the budget cycle, evaluate current revenue and expenses for programs and events in order to determine how to maximize opportunities for net revenue.
- 9.2 Develop and implement an investment policy guiding how long-term reserve funds of the Chapter are invested in order to provide a financial buffer, cover special initiatives, increase assets, and provide long-term financial stability of AIA Chicago.
- 9.3 Increase non-dues revenue to comprise more than 50 percent of the total budget. 



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AIA Chicago Foundation Board of Trustees Appointed for 2025

The AIA Chicago Foundation board of trustees continues its work in cultivating the next generation of architectural change-makers. Following a 2023 bylaws change, this newly appointed board was selected by the Foundation’s nominating committee and formally elected by the 2024 AIA Chicago board of directors.

The Foundation’s mission centers on a crucial goal: investing in Chicago’s next generation of architectural change-makers by awarding scholarships, grants, and recognition. By consolidating scholarship and grant-making activities under the Foundation’s purview, the Chapter and Foundation have created a more focused and efficient pathway for distributing resources to promising students and emerging professionals.

As the Foundation will soon unveil their first strategic plan in more than 60 years, it stands poised to play a pivotal role in ensuring that Chicago’s architectural community remains vibrant and inclusive, creating pathways for diverse voices to enter and advance within the profession.

AIA Chicago Foundation Mission

Investing in Chicago’s next generation of architectural change-makers by awarding scholarships, grants, and recognition.

AIA Chicago Foundation Vision

A city where the architecture profession is diverse, equitable, and inclusive.



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Student Award in Architecture

PHOTO BY BOB. WITH SARAH ELIZABETH LARSON



Members of the AIA Chicago Foundation Board of Trustees alongside Diversity Scholarship and Chicago Award in Architecture recipients.

Student Design Excellence Celebrated in Annual Architecture Awards

The AIA Chicago Foundation celebrated the winners of its Chicago Award in Architecture Student Awards and the recipients of the Diversity Scholarship at the collaborative event Building Together: Awards Ceremony with numerous partner organizations. This event recognizes outstanding talent from across Chicago. 

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Protecting and Advancing the Profession of Architecture

Reading and more reading. During the Spring 2025 Illinois legislative session, nearly 6,400 bills were introduced for consideration. Your AIA Illinois advocacy team has been scrutinizing every one of these bills. Through a rigorous review process, they identify legislation that could impact your practice, focusing on key areas such as architecture licensure, design-build regulations, procurement policies, historic preservation, and educational facilities.

Of these thousands of bills, we have identified 110 that could directly affect your work as an Illinois architect. Our Legislative Committee carefully evaluates each bill to determine whether it deserves our support, requires opposition, or warrants neutral monitoring. We take decisive action by filing witness slips, providing testimony before committees, and engaging directly with legislators to ensure your voice is heard in Springfield. We will continue to monitor these bills through the end of the session in May and again in 2026, along with any new bills introduced.

To maximize our effectiveness, we've partnered with the powerhouse advocacy team at Nekritz Amdor Andersson Group (NAAG). Led by former House members Elaine Nekritz and Steve Andersson, along with experienced Legislative Director John Amdor, NAAG maintains a daily presence at the Capitol. Their established relationships with lawmakers amplify our ability to shape legislation that affects your practice.

Shape the future of your profession: If you are interested in participating in our Legislative Committee, have ideas for topics or bills to monitor, or have any questions about our process, please contact us at advocacy@aiaill.org.

Together, we're building a stronger foundation for architecture in Illinois.


The American Institute of Architects (AIA) is focusing on five key federal legislative issues in 2025.

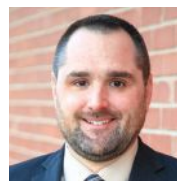
In addition to the work being done at the state level, AIA National is serving you at the federal level, with five key priorities in 2025:

1. **Design freedom for federal architecture** remains a critical priority, as AIA opposes efforts to mandate classical architecture as the preferred style for federal buildings. The organization supports the Democracy in Design Act, which

would codify the longstanding GSA Guiding Principles that emphasize local community input and design flexibility.

2. On federal contracting, **AIA is addressing arbitrary fee limitations**, particularly the outdated six percent cap on architectural and engineering services. While this cap was intended only for cost-plus-fixed-fee contracts, its misapplication to other contract types hampers competition, especially for smaller firms. AIA seeks congressional direction to clarify and modernize these regulations.
3. **Housing affordability** represents another major focus, with AIA advocating for expanded federal programs, including the HOME Investment Partnerships Program, Community Development Block Grants, and Low-Income Housing Tax Credit. The organization is also pushing for the creation of a new Workforce Housing Tax Credit to increase the housing supply across income levels.
4. **Community resilience initiatives** are paramount given increasing frequency of natural disasters. AIA supports full funding for FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) and Flood Mitigation Assistance programs, while also advocating for legislation similar to the previous Resilient AMERICA Act and Shelter Act to incentivize disaster mitigation.
5. Finally, AIA is pursuing several tax priorities affecting architectural practices, including protecting **R&D tax credits and expensing**, maintaining the 199A pass-through deduction, expanding the 179D energy-efficient building deduction, and enhancing the Historic Tax Credit program. These measures are crucial for fostering innovation, sustainability, and business growth in the architecture profession.

Learn more about these issues at [AIA.org/Advocacy](https://www.aia.org/Advocacy). 



Eric Kliner, CAE

AIA Illinois Executive Vice President



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KENDALL MCCAUGHERTY, HALL+MERRICK+MCCAUGHERTY



Perkins&Will has completed the adaptive reuse of two historic buildings for **Numat** into a research and development, manufacturing, and headquarters complex. These buildings on Chicago's west side were abandoned for more than three decades but once served as a foundry where the first electric headlights for locomotives were manufactured in the early 20th century and where Nikola Tesla once worked.

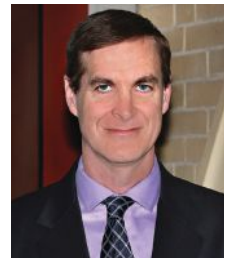
AESTHETICA STUDIO, COURTESY STUDIO GANG



Designed by **Studio Gang**, Spelman College's new **Center for Innovation & the Arts** in Atlanta, Georgia, connects the college with the surrounding community, offering public spaces like a theater and gallery alongside student hubs for collaboration and innovation. This design fosters both internal creativity and community engagement.



Zaneih Ghanayem, a first-year Master of Architecture student, has been named this year's recipient of the **Hartshorne and Plunkard Fellowship at the University of Illinois Chicago's School of Architecture**. The fellowship seeks to increase the number of architecture degrees awarded to students from traditionally underrepresented populations and, in turn, diversify the architectural profession. The fellow receives significant tuition support for up to three years of graduate study, a paid internship at **Hartshorne Plunkard Architecture (HPA)**, and academic and professional mentoring.



Terry Sullivan, AIA, has been promoted to principal at **AltusWorks Inc.**

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VALERIO DEWALT TRAIN



Valerio Dewalt Train (VDT) is pleased to announce the completion of Phase 2 of Shedd Aquarium’s multiyear Experience Evolution, a transformative initiative to enhance visitor access, sustainability, and the connection between people and aquatic life.



Pappageorge Haymes Partners (PH) is pleased to announce two significant milestones: **Jeff Renterghem, AIA**, is celebrating an impressive 30 years at PH. As a partner, Jeff works with a diverse range of clients and building types, including residential high-rises, complex mixed-use projects, schools, hotels, and affordable housing. **Christopher Woodfin, AIA**, is celebrating 10 years at PH. Chris has more than 30 years of multinational architectural and design experience. He has managed projects from conception through construction supervision in a diverse range of project typologies, including mixed-use, institutional, hospitality, commercial, retail, and multifamily residential.



Project Management Advisors Inc. (PMA), a leading national provider of owners’ representative and advisory services, is proud to announce that **Trina Sandschafer, AIA**, has joined PMA as the firm’s new vice president and managing director – Chicago.

WHITNEY ARCHITECTS/FGMA



As of February 10, **FGMA** has moved their Oak Brook office to Westmont, Illinois. Their new address is 1 Westbrook Corporate Center, Suite 1000, Westchester, Illinois 60154.



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Bailey Edward proudly became the fourth Chicago-based architecture firm — and the second woman-owned firm in the city — to earn a **JUST 2.0 label** in 2024. By achieving this transparency framework, Bailey Edward can show peers, clients, consultants, and potential recruits their core values and commitment to the social good.

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Filippini Consulting Architects is excited to announce that **Jalion McLean, Assoc. AIA**; **Eileen Cazares, Assoc. AIA**; and **Madeline Kondic, Assoc. AIA**, have joined the firm as architectural associates. All are spring 2024 graduates; Jalion and Madeline earned their B.Arch degrees from the Illinois Institute of Technology, and Eileen earned her BS.Arch from the University of Illinois Chicago. Jalion, Eileen, Madeline, and **Matt Filippini, AIA**, all served as mentors this past fall in AIA Chicago's Architects in Schools program.



Playful Learning Landscapes Action Network (PLLAN) has appointed **Legat Architect's Robin Randall, FAIA**, to its board of directors. Randall joins as the board's first architect and Chicago-area member.



Bailey Edward celebrated the groundbreaking of **Malcolm X College’s West Campus Community Center for Training and Learning**. With nearly a 17 percent enrollment increase this fall, City Colleges of Chicago is meeting demand with facilities that empower students and uplift communities.



STEVE HALL

Lamar Johnson Collaborative has completed the North American headquarters for global food and beverage ingredient supplier **OFI (Olam Food Ingredients)**. The 80,000-square-foot buildout spans the entire 10th floor of the former Marshall Field and Company Building in the Chicago Loop.



Corgan welcomes **Jonathan Fischel, FAIA**, as senior associate in its Chicago office. Fischel returns to Chicago after more than a decade in Washington, D.C. He previously served as the AIA Chicago president in 2002.



Rivetna Architects is pleased to announce that **Stephen Poston, AIA**, has joined the firm as managing architect. In this role, he will leverage more than 30 years of design and construction experience to provide management and design direction for the firm as it continues to grow and expand into new markets.

PEOPLE + PROJECTS



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LBBA is thrilled to announce two well-deserved promotions. **Jennifer Stanovich, AIA**, has been promoted to associate and **Katie Taylor, Assoc. AIA**, has been promoted to project designer. LBBA is grateful to have Jennifer and Katie on the team to support their passion for creating sustainable, affordable developments that strengthen communities.



Legat Architects has appointed **Jeff Sandberg, AIA**, as president and chief executive officer, and **Zach Wiese, AIA**, as chief operating officer.

ANGIE MCMONIGAL PHOTOGRAPHY



The Chicago office of **HKS** and its project partners celebrated the opening of **UW Health Eastpark Medical Center** in Madison, Wisconsin. The seven-story, 475,750-square-foot outpatient facility offers more than 40 types of specialty care, including programs of distinction for cancer and women's specialties.

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Jessica Saravia, AIA, CSI, CCS, CDT, LEED AP, technical director at **DMAC Architecture & Interiors**, has taken on the role of chair for the Leadership Group of the AIA Building Performance Knowledge Community (BPKC). Alongside this role, she will continue to serve as vice chair of the Chicago Chapter of the Building Enclosure Council (BEC-Chicago).



Ryan Treacy, AIA, project leader at **Krueck Sexton Partners**, recently achieved the Phius Certified Passive House Consultant (CPHC) certification, underscoring his dedication to advancing sustainable, high-performance building design.



Farr Associates is thrilled to announce the licensure and promotion of **Genesis Gadberry, AIA, NCARB**, to project architect. Gadberry received her B.Arch from the University of Texas at Austin in 2023. As project architect, she will advance her technical role of detailing and coordinating Farr's portfolio of high-performance architecture. Also, **Alina Tompert, AIA, WELL AP, LFA**, recently earned the **ILFI's Living Future Accreditation (LFA)**. Earning an LFA signifies expertise in creating healthy, high-performance, and sustainable buildings that benefit communities.



Courtesy of Ward Village



Ko'ula

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Architect: Studio Gang
Client: Howard Hughes



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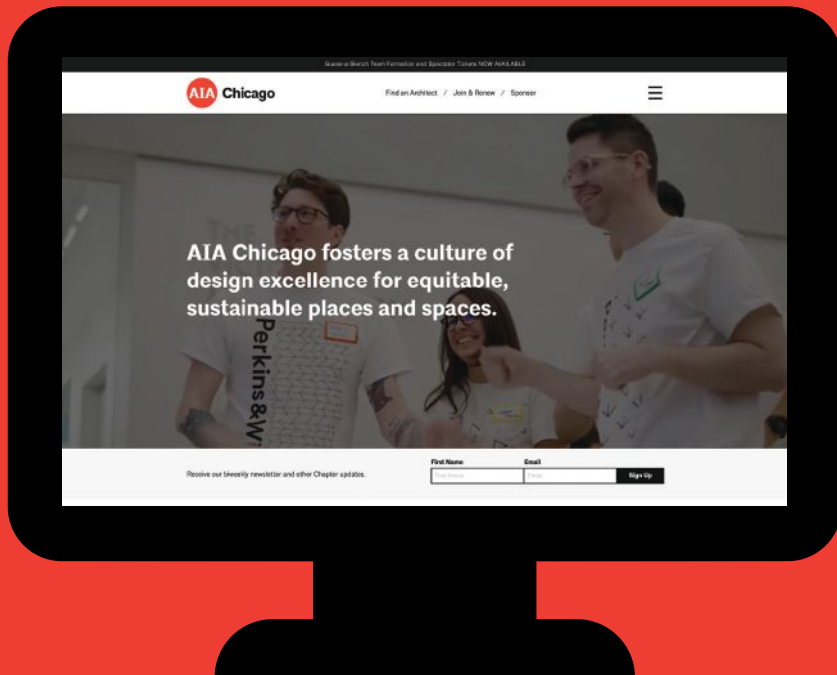
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Beyond Buildings:

Linda Searl, FAIA, Celebrated for a Career of Civic and Architectural Impact

by Taylor Moore

Linda Searl, FAIA, has always been surrounded by strong women. Growing up in Lakeland, Florida, with a mother who was one of the state's first female mayors, Searl learned early on to see possibilities where others saw limitations. So, when one of her University of Florida professors told her, "I don't know if girls should be in architecture," she looked him in the eye and said, defiantly, "Well, this one will be."

Reflecting on this conversation, Searl laughed. "I don't know if he did that to make me more determined or more curious, but it *did* make me more determined. So, I just kept at it."

Searl, founder and principal of Searl Lamaster Howe, is the recipient of the 2024 AIA Chicago Lifetime Achievement Award, which honors accomplished architects who have substantially contributed to Chicago's built environment and architecture community. From 1997 to 2022, Searl served on the City of Chicago's Plan Commission, where she advocated for better designed buildings, more



Searl and a Florida A&M University student exploring how to use photography as a communication tool.

COURTESY OF SEARL LAMASTER HOWE

affordable housing, and minority participation in projects that were city owned or funded. Searl was president of AIA Chicago in 1993 and vice president of the National AIA board of directors in 2000.

"She's one of the most civic architects I know," said **Cynthia Weese, FAIA**, principal of Weese Langley Weese Architects and a longtime friend of Searl. Weese was awarded the chapter's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2023. "She has been exemplary in every way. She has a fine practice, and she has influenced the city. She's spoken out on civic issues and has been part of the process of decision-making, which is really important. She's an example to all — not just women, but all."

As a child, Searl wanted to be an interior designer. She remembers playing with a friend and building "houses" that would take up the whole floor of the sun porch, using materials from around the home. In junior high school, she developed an interest in architecture

"She has been exemplary in every way. She has a fine practice, and she has influenced the city. She's spoken out on civic issues and has been part of the process of decision-making, which is really important. She's an example to all — not just women, but all."

— CYNTHIA WEESE, FAIA



and took a drafting class that inspired her to pursue architecture at the University of Florida, where she was one of only a few women in the program. Boldly defying gender expectations at the time, Searl graduated with both a Bachelor of Architecture in 1971 and a Master of Arts in Architecture in 1973. Her graduate thesis examined best practices for sustainability and solar energy usage in the beach towns of Fort Myers and Naples.

Afterward, she taught at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and Florida A&M University in Tallahassee. Because the architecture programs were new, Searl played a critical role in developing their curricula, incorporating interdisciplinary classes like photography and psychology to round out students' educations. She also established FAMU's architectural library.

But seven years into teaching, she wanted to put theory into practice. "If I don't go and do this, then how can I be a better teacher? I never will be. And so, I thought I really needed to go work in a good office and learn more about what I didn't know," Searl said. In 1980, she moved to Chicago and joined Nagle Hartray & Associates (now Sheehan Nagle Hartray Architects). "I needed the sort of discipline that they had of putting buildings together." For example, she said, "How do you make them not leak? You know, all that kind of stuff you have to know if you're really going to be a good architect."

Searl was one of only a few women in the office, so Weese, who worked in the same office building on Ohio Street, encouraged her to join Chicago Women in Architecture (CWA) to find community. "I admired her courage in picking up from Florida and starting a new life," said Weese, who became fast friends with Searl. "She's always been like that. She's never flinched from doing things that needed to be done."

While at a CWA-curated exhibit at the Chicago Historical Society in 1984, Searl confided to Sabra White, who was associate curator of the Architectural Drawings Collection at the museum, that she was considering starting her own firm. In return, White suggested that Searl talk to **Kathryn Quinn, AIA**, who had been considering the same while working at Hammond, Beeby & Babka.

By January 1986, they opened Quinn and Searl Architects, becoming the only firm at that

time with two women as partners. Together, they designed projects such as the Oriental Theater in Milwaukee and 55 East Erie Street, which was the first residential high-rise in Chicago that was designed by a women-owned firm. Four years later in 1990, they decided to lead their own separate practices after realizing they were too similar and both interested in being on the design side of the firm rather than the business side.

Searl opened her new office next to that of her husband, **Joe Valerio, FAIA**, principal of Valerio Associates (now Valerio Dewalt Train Associates). Demonstrating her penchant for finding opportunity where others saw a set path, Searl chose to go solo in this endeavor. It was common practice at the time for married architects to become business partners, but Searl founded Searl & Associates as an individual endeavor. Later, two of her early employees, **Pamela Lamaster-Millett, AIA**, and **Gregory Howe, AIA**, would join her as partners, forming Searl Lamaster Howe. The firm serves a range of clients with a specific focus on residential architecture, which comprises 75 percent of projects.

'A First-Class Individual'

Casey Cowell is a longtime client of Searl, having worked with her on 10 projects in the past 35 years. One of the biggest projects they collaborated on was a 15,000-square-foot home on the shores of Lake Michigan. Cowell, who had just sold his company, U.S. Robotics, was moving from Chicago to Traverse City, Michigan, and wanted a home fit for entertaining and that could accommodate his wife and their five young children. Due to the nature of the site, it needed to withstand the high winds and dramatic temperature changes that come with living next to the lake. Critically, it also needed to be built quickly.

Construction took place around the clock, sometimes 24 hours a day. All in all, the Cowell family moved in 15 months after purchasing the property, which now included a pool house, a game room, a library, and a workshop for Cowell to build and design. The lodge-like home was characterized by tall wooden beams, natural stone, and 40-foot glass windows offering unobstructed views of Lake Michigan. On the second floor, a 100-foot-long gangway



Searl and her team at Searl Lamaster Howe made history as the first women-owned firm to design a residential high-rise in Chicago, leading a cohesive vision for 55 East Erie Street. COURTESY OF SEARL LAMASTER HOWE



Designed by Searl Lamaster Howe, this 15,000-square-foot Lake Michigan home was built in just 15 months to accommodate Casey Cowell's growing family and love for entertaining. Inspired by national park lodges and minimalist design, the home features soaring wood beams, 40-foot glass windows, and sweeping lake views that blur the line between indoors and out. BRUCE VAN INWEGEN

overlooked the high-ceilinged living room and connected the master suite to the rest of the home. “It’s like you were outside, whether you were inside *or* outside,” said Cowell.

“It’s very detailed, very intricate, but very clean,” Cowell continued. “It’s got a definite lodge feel to it, but it’s light. It’s almost as if minimalist Asian influence was brought to bear on a Montana lodge building in the mountains. ... When you see the house from the water, it’s really quite breathtaking.”

Searl had been inspired by the lodges at the Grand Tetons and other national parks that she and her husband had visited over the years. “The lodge in the Grand Tetons looks out over the mountains and across Jackson Lake,” Searl said. The design “was influenced by that [question] of, ‘What can we do to make this place homey but grand at the same time?’”

Searl and her team not only designed the house but purchased the interior pieces, too. “We bought every piece of furniture, and we bought

all the sheets, the towels, the dishes. You name it, we bought it.”

Cowell went on to work with Searl for more projects, most recently a home renovation in Palm Beach, Florida, in 2008. “I can’t think of a more deserving person,” Cowell said of Searl’s Lifetime Achievement Award. “Linda is very talented and a first-class individual. She works tirelessly with no fanfare, behind the scenes, for which everybody is better off. That’s just how she’s built. If Linda’s on your team, you’re better off.”

‘This Is No Little Plan’

Searl’s reputation as a talented and meticulous visionary caught the attention of the city of Chicago. As AIA Chicago president in 1993, Searl had become well-known in non-architecture circles and was floated as a potential Plan Commission member on a shortlist by the Richard M. Daley administration. Composed partially of mayoral appointees, the Plan

Commission reviews and approves proposals for projects involving planned developments, the Lakefront Protection Ordinance, planned manufacturing districts, industrial corridors, and tax increment financing districts.

Searl was a unique choice because she was an architect and not a developer. She was appointed to the 23-member Plan Commission in 1993, though the experience wasn’t without its challenges. “I had to learn how to get what I wanted without it becoming too much about architecture, but it really was an urban design issue. ... If you’re walking by a building, and it’s a solid brick wall, who’s going to enjoy that walk?”

A group of like-minded peers formed the Chicago Design Consortium, which offered design feedback to developers on pending proposals in front of the Plan Commission. While that work was largely behind the scenes — “Really, there’s no legal way to create a design review committee,” she said — it made improvements big and small. “What I learned from that was the best thing we can do is think, urbanistically, [about] what happens at the street level. If it’s a really bad building, all you can do is make it a little bit better.”

Ensuring that developers followed through on their commitments became a focus, leading Searl to push for verification requirements. At the time, developers would claim to work with women- and minority-owned businesses but were not required to prove that they were actually hiring those contractors. To bolster accountability, Searl and her colleagues encouraged the Department of Buildings to require the developer to provide proof that they had worked with these companies in order to receive the Certificate of Occupancy that proves the building is up to code.

Searl also contributed to the Central Area Plan, a major project to revitalize the downtown area. It was an incredible opportunity for planners, architects, and other experts to present



TOP LEFT: As part of the Central Area Plan, Searl participated in an urban design committee focused on expanding downtown west of the Loop.

COURTESY OF SOM

BOTTOM LEFT: The Central Area Plan also proposed activating waterfronts and open spaces as a precursor to what would become Chicago’s Wild Mile.

COURTESY OF SOM

an ambitious, long-term vision for the city — the first major effort since Daniel Burnham’s 1909 Plan of Chicago. “Mayor Daley was, in terms of architecture and planning, the great mayor,” Searl said. “He wanted these things to be part of his legacy.”

The Central Area Plan was a mammoth project, incorporating the feedback of more than 100 people on several committees over two years, encompassing transportation, housing, economic development, and infrastructure. Approved by the Plan Commission in 2003, it promoted dense, mixed-use development and a new intermodal transit center to connect commuter and intercity transportation, among other recommendations.

“This is no little plan,” the report opened. “This is a plan for urban greatness, as measured by the pride, prosperity, and quality of life of Chicago’s people. This is a plan to expand downtown’s economic engine, which generates revenue for civic improvements in every ward and jobs to support families in every neighborhood.”

One of the lasting results of the plan was the development of the Fulton Market District. “Part of the vision was to take what we know as the Loop area and move it to the west ... which, to me, was sort of like the Wild West,” said Searl, explaining that the West Loop was still very industrial at the time. About 20 years later, Fulton Market is home to some of the highest real estate values around, attracting thousands



Located in a lakeside Michigan community, Harbert Cottage showcases Searl Lamaster Howe’s honest approach to modern design with exposed wood trusses, zinc walls, and crimson windows anchored by a garden-facing screened porch. COURTESY OF SEARL LAMASTER HOWE



Searl’s renovation of Milwaukee’s 1927 Oriental Theater inserted two intimate cinemas within the grand movie palace, using playful perspective and modern materials to echo the building’s exotic, fantastical charm. COURTESY OF SEARL LAMASTER HOWE

of tourists a year with buzzy restaurants and inviting corporations to open regional and national offices in the area.

Mentoring the Next Generation

Searl didn't just participate in the field of architecture — she led it. From AIA Chicago president in 1993 to national AIA VP in 2000, she redefined the profession. She co-created the Divine Detail Award, celebrating design brilliance, and left her mark on boards like the Graham Foundation and Archeworks. Searl's influence is undeniable.

Passionate about supporting the next generation of architects, she was a founding mentor of AIA Chicago's Bridge Mentorship Program, which connects early-career professionals with senior architects as mentors.

That is where she met **Calli Verkamp, AIA**. At the time, in 2016, Verkamp was early in her career and navigating the workplace. Now, Verkamp is a principal at Wheeler Kearns Architects.

"As my career has evolved, the advice has also grown with me," said Verkamp. "I recently came into an ownership role, and she was really helpful as I was negotiating that. She shared a lot of information with me about how she had done succession planning at her own firm. ... So, her voice was really instrumental — having someone on the outside [whom] I can talk to and bounce ideas off of as I was making those decisions and moving into that role. She's really been there and [helped] me throughout every stage. I've known her the majority of my career at this point."

Verkamp was not surprised when Searl ended up winning. "She is a very well-rounded architect in the way that she contributes to the profession. Her design work is always stellar. That's why her firm has such a great reputation. She also has contributed civically in a way that sets a great example for me and for other architects. I feel her legacy is a culmination of all those different things she's been involved in.

"What I've learned — and hope to continue to learn from her — is not to set limitations on yourself."

Through her groundbreaking career, Linda Searl has not only demonstrated exceptional architectural talent and civic leadership but has also paved the way for women in the field, proving time and again that vision and determination can transform limitations into lasting legacies. **CA**



Searl and her office visit Paris in 2005. COURTESY OF SEARL LAMASTER HOWE



Searl traveling in her Austin Mini to the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. COURTESY OF SEARL LAMASTER HOWE



Linda Searl, FAIA, with 2024 AIA Chicago President Lynda Dossey at Designight 2024. KAI BROWN



Searl, Pam Lamaster,
and Greg Howe at the
Fondation Le Corbusier.
COURTESY OF SEARL
LAMASTER HOWE



LEFT: **Linda Searl, FAIA**, accepts her Lifetime Achievement Award alongside her husband, **Joe Valerio, FAIA**.
KAI BROWN



RIGHT: Florida A&M University Special Studies students showcase building components they designed as part of a child-focused placemaking project led by Searl and a fellow faculty member.
COURTESY OF SEARL
LAMASTER HOWE

Bridge at 15

How AIA Chicago's Signature
Mentorship Program Is Transforming
Lives – and Changing the Profession

Introduction by Carl Sergio, AIA, NOMA, Bridge Co-Director

This spring marks the 15th year of AIA Chicago's Bridge Mentorship Program. Initially piloted in 2009 with the help of a College of Fellows component grant, the program has grown into one of the premier AIA mentorship opportunities in the country. Each year, it connects between 15 to 20 emerging professionals with Fellows as part of an eight-month curriculum of curated programs coupled with informal, one-on-one meetings. The program fosters mentorship, inspires leadership, and encourages AIA members to reinterpret and evaluate the trajectory of the practice. The result is a dynamic, multigenerational network of Chicago architects who continue to learn from one another long after the program ends.

The program's impact is impossible to miss. Nearly all Chicago firms and architects are just one degree of separation from the nearly 340 people who have participated in the program since its founding. By connecting young professionals' eagerness to learn and grow with the knowledge and experience of seasoned AIA Fellows, Bridge has now catalyzed the careers of more than 260 emerging professionals, while serving as a platform for more than 80 Fellows to fulfill their charge from the College of Fellows to mentor the coming generations.

More than **100 different firms** have had staff participate in the Bridge program at some point in time.



LEFT: Program directors Carl Sergio, AIA, and Jessie LaFree, AIA, pose in the AIA Chicago Host Chapter Lounge at A'22, the AIA Conference on Architecture, held in Chicago in 2022.

MATT DUMICH

Bridge mentors and mentees participate in casual conversations to discuss industry and professional development topics.

CARL SERGIO



Eight of the last 12 Dubin Family Young Architect Award winners have been past Bridge participants.

Bridge is the brainchild of AIA members **Matt Dumich, FAIA**; **Mark Schwamel, FAIA**; and **Brett Taylor, AIA**, who were, themselves, young professionals at the time of the program's founding. Working together, they built Bridge from the ground up with the goal of developing future leaders and strengthening AIA Chicago's leadership pipeline. However, its value and influence has extended well beyond the individual relationships it has formed and into the network and very ethos of our chapter. Many past participants are now firm owners,

partners, and principals. Some have even gone on to start their own mentorship programs in other cities.

The program's founders have advanced in their careers, too, embodying the kind of professional leadership that Bridge was conceived to inspire. Dumich and Schwamel are part of the three percent of the more than 100,000 AIA members recognized with AIA's highest membership honor — investiture into the College of Fellows — in part due to the success and impact of the Bridge program. Meanwhile, Taylor, now a principal at Gensler, has been to London and back as he works on mixed-use developments, mid-rises, and high-rises around the country and abroad. This has enabled the founders to be mentors in the very program they created many years ago.

A lot has happened in 15 years. As Bridge has grown, its focus remains the same: bridging the gap between the need for mentorship in our profession. Yet, our approach has shifted over time, particularly when we decided to rapidly pivot to a fully virtual model in 2020, instead of canceling the program, and managed to largely recreate the experience of the monthly in-person sessions on Zoom. This resulted in what was, according to many participants, the highlight of their professional lives each month during the pandemic as we gathered to weather the uncertainty with fellowship and camaraderie.

In celebration of this milestone year, *Chicago Architect* invited Dumich, Schwamel, and Taylor to look back over the success of the past 15 years, reflect on the program's influence, and look ahead to what the future holds. Their essay appears in the following pages of this issue. We are also excited to host a summer reunion for all past participants.

Bridge has been more than just a career catalyst for me — it has been a profound opportunity to serve our profession, support my friends and colleagues, and witness firsthand the impact mentorship can have on others. It has also been the strongest proof-of-concept for the difference I can make. I am grateful for the chance to participate in, lead, and shape this program, and I cannot imagine my professional life without it.

Here's to the next 15 years.

“We built Bridge simply to provide a connection between emerging and experienced architects. We are truly amazed at the impact the program has had on the profession not only in Chicago but beyond. After creating the program 15 years ago and recently becoming an AIA Fellow and now serving as a mentor in the Bridge program, nothing could be more rewarding than that full-circle moment.”

— MARK SCHWAMEL, FAIA



Bridge participants visit the Herman Miller Chicago Showroom in 2023. CARL SERGIO

Bridge at 15: Reflections

Commentary by **Matt Dumich, FAIA;**
Mark Schwamel, FAIA; and **Brett Taylor, AIA,**
Bridge Co-Founders

No one would argue that mentorship isn't a keystone of architectural practice and an integral component in a young architect's professional development. However, the specialization of today's modern practice has created a shift away from this form of professional education and relied more on a community learning approach. Bridge was created to bring back the one-on-one mentoring relationship of the past by connecting young architects' need for mentorship with the knowledge and experience of seasoned AIA Fellows.

The AIA network is built on the passing of knowledge — it is our profession's true currency. The impact Bridge has had over the last 15 years has been hugely influential, serving as a national model for mentoring and inspiring so many other chapters across the country. We have personally been able to connect and share our knowledge and experience of building and growing a successful mentorship program with so many AIA colleagues in large and small chapters. Programs such as PIERS at AIA Kansas City, TORCH at AIA New York, ARCHway at AIA Columbus, and so many others are a testament to the wide reach and influence of Bridge. In addition, we have been able to share the program's framework and keys to success by presenting the Bridge program across multiple AIA National and NOMA conferences and local AIA grassroots conferences.

The second-order impact that Bridge has had through the reach of its participants and those of these additional programs is immeasurable but certainly profound. Justice

"I am grateful to have been a mentor to so many women in the field and hope this program keeps opening doors for all those who need a voice!"

JULIE HACKER, FAIA
MENTOR

"I have never felt **more connected** with the industry as I do now, with a cross generational support system of incredibly talented individuals that come together to form such an amazing AIA community."

REBECCA BROUK, AIA
MENTEE





Alliance for Design Education in Philadelphia; Trinity College's mentorship program in Hartford, Connecticut; and AIA Chicago's own Transform Leadership Program are just a few examples of this. Firms such as Wheeler Kearns Architects, LBBA, The Lamar Johnson Collaborative, Gensler, SmithGroup, and EXP have built legacies of mentorship and increased young professional participation of up to a dozen or more staff in some offices, creating and strengthening networks and relationships within those firms. More than 100 different firms have had staff participation at some point in time.

Mentors **Tom Hoepf, FAIA**; **Julie Hacker, FAIA**; **Dan Wheeler, FAIA**; **Mark Sexton, FAIA**; and **John Syvertsen, FAIA**, have each participated in more than 10 mentorship cycles since the beginning of the program. Eight of the last 12 Dubin Family Young Architect Award winners have been past Bridge participants; nearly 30 percent of past participants went on to an official AIA chapter leadership role; and 25 percent of the individual mentoring relationships formed during the program still meet on a regular basis.

Fifteen past Bridge participants have gone on to start architecture firms, and more than 20 Bridge participants have served as AIA board members on both local and state chapter boards and Knowledge committees. In recognition of the program's impact at AIA Chicago over the years, Bridge and its participants were celebrated as the featured theme and backdrop for the AIA Chicago Host Chapter Lounge during the 2022 AIA National Conference in Chicago.

The Bridge program also gave rise to the creation of AIA Chicago's Wing Mentorship Program in 2019, which

echoes Bridge's DNA by supporting architecture college students in the transition from academia to professional practice. The program is a semester-long pairing of local architecture students with young working professionals who are also graduates of the AIA Chicago Bridge program, thereby understanding the mechanisms and true value of mentorship relationships. These one-on-one relationships give past Bridge participants a platform to mentor downstream to college students, aiding their career advancement through project critiques, portfolio reviews, office and site visits, and assistance with job hunting.

Encouragingly, Bridge alumni have been more heavily composed of women and people of color in recent years, with the promise of diversifying the College of Fellows — and the pool of mentors — in ways that we've long hoped for. With these goals within reach, Bridge will continue to impact AIA chapters around the country through the fostering of new mentorship programs and the dispersing of Bridge alumni. The program and AIA Chicago will reach further down into our educational system to foster a bigger, better, and more diverse talent pool of students, graduates, and future leadership, all while expanding the network of those working in concert toward common goals and shared visions.

Fifteen years out from its first cohort, Bridge alumni are only just at the beginning of their ascent to Fellowship, ownership, and leadership. We look forward to seeing a chapter — and industry — led by those who understand the power of servant leadership in contributing to others and elevating all voices. **CA**

ABOVE: The AIA Chicago Host Chapter Lounge at A'22 celebrated the impact of the Bridge program through testimonials from past program mentors and mentees. One such example is included on the previous page.

CARL SERGIO

AT RIGHT: From left to right, counter-clockwise: Brett Taylor, AIA (in a suit); Matt Dumich, FAIA (in a pink shirt); and Mark Schwamel, FAIA (in a blue shirt), pictured in 2011 during the formative days of the Bridge program.



“As we grew into opportunities and roles within the AIA, we always felt the need to give something back to an organization that had become so instrumental into our success, at our firms, with our colleagues, and within the organization. We found that fellowship and mentorship are really the founding principles of the AIA. How do we share our success with a broader audience? Once we realized that this void existed and through Matt and Mark’s connections to other AIA chapters, we developed the Bridge program for Chicago.”

— BRETT TAYLOR, AIA

In Conversation with

Evelyn Lee, FAIA

2025 President of The American Institute of Architects

Jen Masengarb, Assoc. AIA, executive director, recently sat down for a conversation with **Evelyn Lee, FAIA**, AIA's 2025 president. In their discussion, Lee discussed the impact of AIA engagement on career growth, the need for stronger business acumen in architecture, and the expanding role of architects in housing, policy, and technology. As the 101st person to fill this position, she emphasized inclusivity, leadership development, and innovation to ensure a resilient and future-ready profession.

This interview was edited for length and clarity. An expanded version is available at AIACHicago.org/EvelynLee-InConversation.

Jen Masengarb (JM): You've served AIA in many leadership roles over the years — at the local, state, and national levels. From your days as a student leader until now, serving all 100,000-plus members across the country as AIA president, you've had a long and deep impact. What would you say to recent graduates and emerging professionals here in Chicago about the value and impact of getting involved in their local chapter of AIA?

Evelyn Lee (EL): Getting involved in my local AIA chapter changed the trajectory of my career. When I first engaged with AIA, I didn't see myself as a leader. I was just showing up, trying to find my place in the profession. But through

AIA, I found a community that supported and challenged me, ultimately shaping how I approach architecture and leadership today.

And that's the thing — one opportunity leads to another. Taking on that first leadership role led me to new conversations, new challenges, and new ways to serve. Each step opened doors I never could have predicted. It's how I went from local involvement to state leadership, to national committees, and ultimately, to serving as AIA president.

That same opportunity for growth and community exists in your local AIA Chicago chapter. It's a space where you can build relationships with mentors who will help guide

your career, gain leadership experience that sets you apart, and contribute to shaping the future of the profession.

I know it can feel intimidating to step into a room full of experienced professionals, but your voice matters. You don't need decades of experience to make an impact. The profession needs fresh perspectives and new energy now more than ever. So, if you're wondering whether to get involved, say yes. Show up. Take that first step. You never know where it might lead — or the lifelong friendships you might find along the way.

JM: Your career path has spanned traditional architecture roles as well as nontraditional roles — using your skills and experiences as an architect in technology and business development. During your campaign, you talked about how this gives you a unique lens on the profession as well as within AIA. With that in mind, what specific issues do you plan to champion during your time leading the institute?

EL: My career path has given me the opportunity to see the architecture profession from multiple vantage points — inside firms, on the client side, and in technology and operations. That perspective allows me to approach leadership at AIA with both deep respect for our traditions and a clear understanding of how we must evolve to remain relevant and impactful. As AIA president, I plan to champion three key areas:

1. Strengthening the Business of Architecture

For too long, architecture has been seen as a profession of passion rather than a business that creates real value. We need to equip architects with better business acumen, financial literacy, and strategic tools to ensure firms — of all sizes — are resilient, profitable, and able to take on



2025 President **Evelyn Lee, FAIA**, poses with current and past strategic council members at her December 2024 inauguration. Left to right: **Illya Azaroff, FAIA** (2025 president-elect); **Graciela Carrillo, AIA** (2025-2027 at-large director, board); **Willy Zambrano, FAIA** (2024 AIA New York State Chapter president); **Evelyn Lee, FAIA** (2025 AIA president); **Heather Philip-O'Neal, AIA** (2024-2025 treasurer); **Latoya Nelson Kamdang, AIA** (2024-2026 at-large director, board); and **George Miller, FAIA** (2009-2010 AIA president). STACY MOSES

the challenges of the future. AIA's new business courses are a major step in that direction, but we need to continue expanding resources that help architects build thriving, financially strong firms.

It's also time for new operational and business models that move us away from a culture of being overworked and underpaid. If we want our profession to be valued, we need to start by valuing ourselves. That means intentionally building better business practices and shifting our mindset to one that seeks out opportunity. We can no longer afford to simply react to challenges. Instead, we must be proactive, strategic, and intentional in how we move forward.

2. Expanding the Role of Architects in Housing and New Markets

The traditional practice of architecture is just one way to use our skills, but it shouldn't be the only path we talk about. Many architects have explored nontraditional career paths and found themselves in fields that are shaping affordable housing solutions — whether in development, policy, finance, or technology. The built environment needs our expertise in many places beyond the drafting table.

We have a housing crisis in this country. Architects are uniquely positioned to be part of the solution, but we need to expand our role beyond just designing buildings. If we want to make real progress, we need more architects involved in housing policy, financing, and development — roles where the critical decisions about affordability, access, and long-term resilience are being made. AIA must support and elevate architects who are working across disciplines to make housing more equitable and attainable.

3. Harnessing Technology and AIA to Shape the Future of the Profession

The fusion of technological advancements into our practices opens the door to transformative possibilities. From the adoption of AI in design methodologies to the development of resilient materials, the future of architecture is brimming with opportunities waiting to be seized. Architects must move from being passive adopters of technology to actively shaping how these tools are integrated into our work.

AIA has a critical role to play in guiding firms through this evolution, helping architects understand how to leverage technology to enhance — not replace — their expertise.



AIA President Evelyn Lee, FAIA (right), with AIA Chicago's executive director, Jen Masengarb, Assoc. AIA.
STACY MOSES

Another aspect of our viability as a profession is ensuring that we use these advancements not just to improve efficiency but to drive innovation in housing, sustainability, and resilience.

At the heart of all of this is a fundamental shift in mindset — one that positions architects not just as designers of buildings but as leaders, problem-solvers, and advocates shaping the built environment. If we embrace new operational models, new roles, and new ways of thinking, we will not only secure the future of our profession but expand our influence in ways we haven't yet imagined. That's the vision I want to drive forward at AIA.

JM: We know that many architecture graduates are thinking about the practice of architecture and firm culture differently than the generations that came before them. Many are also exploring alternative career paths beyond traditional practice. How can the AIA and our local AIA Chicago chapter better support these members?

EL: The way architecture graduates think about practice and firm culture is shifting, and we need

to embrace it. Many emerging professionals seek flexibility, purpose-driven work, and financially sustainable careers. Others are exploring alternative career paths that leverage their architectural education in new ways.

I am passionate about AIA being inclusive of those who have taken nontraditional paths. The call for diversity in thought and innovation has never been louder. Innovation isn't optional — it's essential. To meet this moment of change, we need everyone at the table.

I believe there are five ways AIA can support emerging professionals:

1. *Expanding how we define success.* Success in architecture isn't one-size-fits-all. Architects thrive in tech, development, public policy, sustainability, and real estate. AIA should celebrate and support diverse career trajectories.
2. *Supporting mentorship and networking.* I've experienced firsthand the value of mentors and allies in my career. AIA must continue to connect graduates with mentors and clear barriers that stand in their way.

The lifelong connections made through school and AIA chapters are invaluable as young professionals grow their careers, start families, and build practices.


3. *Enhancing business and leadership training.* Architecture education lacks business and operations training. AIA's new business courses are a great start, but we must continue to provide firm operations, financial literacy, and leadership resources to empower the next generation.
4. *Strengthening alliances with key organizations.* Collaboration is key. AIA must work closely with ACSA, AIAS, NAAB, NCARB, and NOMA to improve education, licensure, and equity in the profession.
5. *Building a more inclusive and adaptable profession.* Younger architects demand equity, work-life balance, and modern firm cultures. AIA can help firms implement best practices for recruitment, retention, and leadership development to retain top talent.

AIA Chicago can continue to be a hub for these conversations — hosting career transition workshops, promoting leadership models, and ensuring all architects feel valued, regardless of their career path.

AIA must serve all architects, not just those in traditional roles. By broadening our definition of practice and embracing new career trajectories, we ensure a vibrant, resilient, and relevant profession for generations to come.

JM: What are you most looking forward to this year as the 101st president of AIA?

EL: I am most looking forward to connecting with our members, meeting architects where they are, hearing their challenges, and ensuring AIA is delivering meaningful support. Whether through local chapter visits, virtual conversations, or national advocacy efforts, my goal is to make sure every architect sees AIA as a place where they belong and can thrive.

This year is about opportunity and momentum. From advancing housing solutions and climate resilience to navigating AI's impact on the profession, AIA is positioned to lead. But leadership isn't just about policy; it's about people. I'm excited to foster a stronger, more inclusive community where architects — across all career paths — can grow, innovate, and shape the future of the built environment. Let's thrive in '25 and beyond. 

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EVENING CUE

BEHIND THE SCREENS

“Behind the Screens” is a series developed by AIA Chicago’s Editorial Advisory Committee to highlight the members of the chapter. Throughout the year, this series will showcase Fellows, Architects, Associates, and Affiliate members. If you’d like to nominate someone, please write to editor@aiachicago.org.

NAME
Gracia Maria Shiffrin

**AFFILIATIONS/
CREDENTIALS**
Attorney, FAIA,
Certified Fraud
Examiner

TITLE
Financial Analyst

COMPANY
U.S. Department of
Housing and Urban
Development,
Office of
General Counsel,
Enforcement Center

DEGREE(S)
Bachelor of
Architecture,
Louisiana State
University;
Juris Doctor,
DePaul University

**AIA CHICAGO
INVOLVEMENT**
Trustee and
Secretary,
AIA Chicago

You are currently serving as the AIA Chicago Foundation secretary. What advice can you give to others for why they should be involved with the AIA Chicago Foundation?

Being on the board of trustees of the AIA Chicago Foundation allows you to contribute in a meaningful way to make architecture a more welcoming professional path, it gives you the chance to recognize and nurture new talent in the Chicago area, and it gives you a sense of belonging. The Foundation is always seeking to enlist AIA members to join the board and take a leadership role along with the other trustees and the dynamic staff of AIA Chicago.

The AIA Chicago Foundation makes a tremendous impact in the lives of young designers. What is your favorite impact story?

My favorite impact story is Maria Hidalgo, who was one of our inaugural recipients of the Diversity Scholarship in 2019. With the Foundation's help, she finished her studies at IIT, she's enjoyed the mentorship of a dedicated AIA mentor, and she's expanded her professional network. At this early stage in her career, she is showing a commitment to give back by getting involved and keeping the doors open for those after her. As an invited juror for the AIA Chicago Foundation, she was engaged in the interviews and provided meaningful insight into the discussions.

You became an attorney and achieved Fellowship in the AIA. What advice to others can you provide on how to achieve two highly desired credentials?

My advice is to follow your curiosity and once you set a goal, dive in, focus your efforts, and plow through. If the work feels compelling and keeps you engaged, you will

manage the obstacles that will come. Along the way, you will discover so many things about yourself, especially when you put your talents to use for the benefit of those in need. I have also found that it's important not to be motivated by titles; it's the journey that counts. Another piece of advice is to surround yourself with a support system of cheerleaders, meaning your family and friends, who will stand by you when the road is long and difficult.

What advice would you give to a younger version of yourself?

I'd tell myself not to take things so seriously.

What does a typical day look like for you?

A typical day starts with coffee with my husband while watching a recording of last night's *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* and flipping through the screens of *The New York Times* and *The Chicago Tribune*. My workday begins with checking email and calendar, signing on, and inevitably changing passwords in the countless systems I use at the office. There are often morning team meetings. Then, there's the steady review of financial statements, mortgages, regulatory documents, and other business agreements, coupled with research of applicable rules and regulations. Then, I spend a lot of time collaborating to find ways to turn a dry story of noncompliance into a coherent piece of plain English that is understandable and animates the other side to cooperate.

What gets you out of bed in the morning?

The sound of the coffee grinder and the strong coffee that my husband makes. Add to that blue skies and sunshine, the need to check up on my elderly parents in



Gracia Shiffrin, FAIA (front, fourth from left), with a group of The Jefferson Society members, a national organization of lawyers who are also architects, after being sworn in as members of the U.S. Supreme Court Bar. The late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg can be seen seated in front center.

El Salvador, the hope to hear from my daughters (one lives in Romania, the other is away at college), and the daily challenges at the office.

What or who has inspired you to become an architect?

My father inspired me to become an architect. When I was growing up in El Salvador, my dad was the head of the country’s Social Trust for Housing. His agency pooled funds from workers, employers, and the national government to create a trust for the development of affordable housing. He’d take my siblings and me to groundbreaking and openings of large developments of single-family homes all over the country. He had wanted to be an architect, but he was already married with kids when he started college, and they didn’t offer architecture at night, so he became an economist. Growing up, our house was full of his paintings and sculptures, and he was constantly making improvements to our house. The smell of concrete is one of my favorite smells — always brings me back to my childhood days.

What has been the most valuable resource to you in your career? (This can be a mentor, scholarship, organization, initiative, program, tool, etc.)

In my early days in architecture, the most valuable resource I had was the group of friends I made during architecture school. We didn’t have mentors, but we learned together, and we pushed each other as we got jobs,

became licensed, moved around the country, and grew into ownership and management. As a new attorney, one of my supervisors took an interest in me, and she’s been a mentor and friend for over 25 years. I owe a lot to these individuals who have been a sounding board and support for the many professional adventures I’ve had over the years.

What does equity mean to you?

I think of equity as everyone having a fair chance to participate based on the talents and abilities that you bring to the table.

What change would you like to see in Chicago’s built environment?

I would like to see more and more historic preservation and adaptive reuse of existing structures. It’s hard not to get excited about these effective forms of sustainability while preserving Chicago’s architectural heritage. **CA**

The views and opinions expressed herein are solely those of Gracia Maria Shiffrin in her personal capacity and do not represent the official position of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) or any other federal agency or the United States government.



Gracia Shiffrin, FAIA’s father, Rene Figueroa, being sworn in by the president of El Salvador as the head of the Fondo Social Para la Vivienda (Social Trust for Housing) in the late 1970s.

“In my early days in architecture, the most valuable resource I had was the group of friends I made during architecture school. We didn’t have mentors, but we learned together, and we pushed each other as we got jobs, became licensed, moved around the country, and grew into ownership and management.”

– GRACIA MARIA SHIFFRIN, FAIA

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