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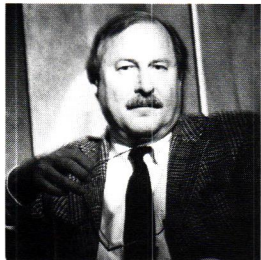
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GENERAL CONTRACTORS BUILDING SUCCESS

Battling Anonymity by Frank McCurdy, AIA President



If we are asking the courts to protect our profession from external threats, we may have lost the battle with the public already.

In the last year or so I have found myself

traveling quite a lot, both for business and professional reasons. I serve on a few national AIA committees that meet in different locations, including other countries. This allows me a view of architecture through the eyes of the English, the Spanish, the Japanese, etc. The role of the architect in most of these countries is more broad and better defined than in this country. In fact, in the United States people are not sure what architects do! Our jobs are ill-defined by society and law. Universities aren't sure what courses to offer, or how to structure their curriculum to serve the needs of future architects. The law of the land (at least in Pennsylvania) isn't sure what architects do versus what designers or engineers or accountants or builders do. In fact, architects aren't sure what they do anymore!

I am concerned that as a profession we have allowed ourselves to be perceived by the public very narrowly. Because of this, we have relinquished roles that were formerly ours. The great number of new housing starts around the country should be a sign of rejoicing for architects. Yet very few of the houses ever had the benefit of an architect.

Perception: "Architects are only for the wealthy." "Architects are going to add unnecessary costs to the house." "Architects don't understand the housing market; they don't know what sells!" Does this sound familiar? How many times have Construction Managers or General Contractors been advising school boards on the selection of architects? How many times have major infrastructure projects been formulated without the input of an architect?

In a recent talk, Robert Peck, Director of Public Building Services of the General Services Administration, stated that as long as architects acted as if their only legitimate expertise was "coloring facades" they would be paid accordingly. He bemoaned the fact that architects, with all their training, have given up so much to others who do not understand the far-reaching environmental implications of their decisions; they merely stepped up to the plate.

In the coming year there will be a number of bills introduced in the Pennsylvania Legislature that will dramatically affect the practice of architecture. Probably the most significant will be a state-wide building code. Next in importance is not a bill, but rather the legal definition of what an architect is licensed to do, versus what an engineer, or designer can do. Currently, plans sent to Labor and Industry for approval are processed as long as they are stamped with a professional license, be it an architect, engineer or barber! "Barber" may be a bit of a stretch, but the point is the L & I maintain that it is impossible to police whether an architect, designer or engineer should seal documents. This is especially true in a lot of gray areas that have not had precedent-setting cases to define who should be the responsible party.

You can be sure that AIA Pittsburgh, PSA, and AIA National will do everything they can to protect architects' rights and public safety. This is what they are chartered to do. However, if we are asking the courts to protect our profession from external threats, we may have lost the battle with the public already. We have to define our professional activities not only by legislation, but more importantly by example. In other words—get involved. Get on building committees, zoning boards, or public affairs councils. Become visible. Get into politics. We are quick to criticize lawyers who seem ready to run for office at a drop of a hat. But where are the architects on school boards who can advise the accountants and attorneys to use qualifications based selection to insure quality and reasonable fees.

Most architects were attracted to the profession because they liked to design. As we matured in the learning process, we came to see that design was just one facet, and that creativity is inherent in all facets. And we came to see that we have to go beyond buildings if we are going to have an environment that we can truly say was made better because of us. 🏠

IN THIS ISSUE

Neighborhood Development 6
 Our neighborhoods. New Urbanists call them the essential unit of development. Mayor Tom Murphy calls them the heartbeat of the city. More than 300,000 Pittsburgh residents call them home. Where are they headed?

HOPE for Mixed Income Neighborhoods 10
 A competitive federal initiative offers grants to reclaim distressed communities.

Whadaya Know? 12
 Growing attention to continuing education requirements has spurred new ways of learning a thing or two.

Viewpoint 3
 Homefront 4
 News 5, 14
 Bricks and Mortar 15
 Breaking Ground 16
 Calendar 17
 Dossier 19
 Meeting info 23

On the cover: The renovation of an old South Side theater into a new retail space is one of a number of recent signs that the neighborhood's commercial market is seeing a resurgence of activity. *Rendering:* John Martine, AIA, Integrated Architectural Services Corp.

AIA Pittsburgh serves 12 Western Pennsylvania counties as the local component of the American Institute of Architects and the Pennsylvania Society of Architects. The objective of AIA Pittsburgh is to improve, for society, the quality of the built environment by further raising the standards of architectural education, training and practice; fostering design excellence; and promoting the value of architectural services to the public. AIA membership is open to all registered architects, architectural interns, and a limited number of professionals in supporting fields.

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The Vision Thing by Michelle Fanzo, Editor

This month, *Columns* takes a look at

neighborhood development, the third feature in our four-part series on development in our city and region. We found more projects and discussion underway than expected. As we do not pretend to offer a comprehensive list of neighborhood projects in our "What's Up?" sidebar (p. 6), there is still plenty of ground to be covered by raising questions in your community, or calling a colleague in Perry Hilltop or Mt. Washington to find out what is in the works.



"When people say there isn't enough vision in development, it usually means that the vision isn't their vision. We have no lack of vision in Pittsburgh, it's just that everyone has one and they're going in different directions."

We unearthed a number of positive forces encouraging well-designed development, such as the recently formed partnership of eight community-based organizations in the East End that are working together on nine neighborhood projects. While traditional support systems for neighborhoods, such as government funding and civic involvement, continue to dwindle, it is just these kinds of new partnerships that will aid Pittsburgh in realizing its potential. Though frustrating, limited resources are encouraging people to coordinate their efforts who have not previously shared ideas—a breeding ground for creative solutions to perennial problems.

We also, unfortunately, uncovered a number of forces that hinder quality neighborhood development: political cache is not high for many community projects, funding is dwindling, need and costs are growing, historic preservation is expensive, community turf battles generate hostilities and competition for limited resources, distressed areas that are too expensive to tackle breed greater community disinvestment. Still others point to a lack of cohesive vision for the city and region as the primary disincentive for quality development.

Said one community organizer who asked not to be named, "When people say there isn't enough vision in development, it usually means that the vision isn't *their* vision. We have no lack of vision in Pittsburgh, it's just that everyone has one and they're going in different directions."

In an effort to coordinate plans for neighborhoods, Mayor Murphy recently encouraged community development corporations to create strategic plans for their neighborhoods. The goal is for the community to have a coherent vision of, and significant input into, the future of their neighborhood. Some community development players sense this effort has taken a back seat to emphasis on Downtown and North Side developments.

Also this month, Carl Freedman, AIA provides individuals and firms with ideas on gaining Continuing Education credits. Just reading his article beginning on page 12 should be worth a couple of Learning Units! We also take a look at our new AIA Board members, and hear the viewpoint of new AIA Pittsburgh president, Frank McCurdy.

Next month *Columns* concludes its development series with a peek at projects and trends underway in the region. We encourage members to call us with information on projects in western Pennsylvania that are outside City of Pittsburgh limits. What are the trends and issues in surrounding counties? Is coordination increasing between the city and region? What mechanisms are in place to foster this kind of discourse? Are they working? We want to know. 🏠

