

Wisconsin Architect



We Have Met The Enemy . . . And They Are Us!

By Eric Englund

There appears to be a generally accepted consensus within the architectural profession that the profession suffers from lack of adequate compensation for the services provided. "People don't understand what we do." "People think that all we do is draw blue lines on white paper." "Owners think that they can competitively bid for architectural services, but don't understand that in choosing architects on the basis of low bid they (the owner) might be comparing apples and oranges." These comments are reflective of how the profession views itself and the public's perception of architecture.

While admittedly there is room for substantial public education regarding the scope, ability and competence of professional architects . . . perhaps architecture's greatest enemy is itself.

Consider the following situation as reported recently in *The Milwaukee Journal*. A Library Board had recommended that Firm A be hired because of its previous expertise in building libraries and obtaining federal funds. The firm had quoted a reported fee of 7% of the actual costs of the building, which fee included the costs of hiring a library consultant. Firm A was to be paid \$7,500 to prepare a grant application.

According to *The Milwaukee Journal* Firm B appeared and "bid" 5% of the actual cost of the building. Their "bid" included the costs of preparing the necessary grant application but did not include a consultant's fee. Apparently when Firm B recognized that the Library Board was recommending Firm A, Firm B changed its "bid" to include the cost of the consultant within its 5% "bid".

And then . . . came Firm C. Learning of the interest of the Library Board in pursuing the project, Firm C submitted an unsolicited bid of 5.2%

THE ETHICS WAR



which included the cost of a library consultant. Firm C further sweetened the pot by indicating that they would charge the city **nothing** for filing for the federal grant **even if the city did not proceed with the project.**

Now to this non-architect who read the article in *The Milwaukee Journal*, it appeared that Firm A had negotiated a fair and reasonable fee with the Library Board. The city had allocated \$2,500 for payment to Firm A in connection with its grant application and was considering spending an additional \$5,000 to cover more detailed plans to be submitted with the grant application. Apparently firms B and C smelled a commission . . . and in their exuberance started making substantial concessions as to their fees. Firm C not only substantially reduced their fees, but reportedly indicated that the city would have **no cost** for preparing and filing the grant application if the city did not proceed with the project.

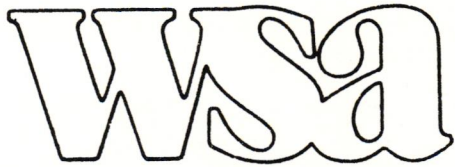
Frankly, the WSA can bust its "back" attempting to educate the general public on the quality, competence, and professionalism of architecture, but this kind of a situation appears to substantially negate any such efforts.

Take off your architect's hat for a minute and reflect on this chronology of events. If you were reading a newspaper article about these events or sitting on the Library

Board, wouldn't you get the impression that the "profession" of architecture is demanding bidding for professional services? Wouldn't you get the impression that architects come cheap? Wouldn't you get the impression that architectural fees are artificially high since one firm can quote a fee which is over $\frac{1}{3}$ less than another firm? Wouldn't you get the impression that architects are high rollers since one firm was apparently willing to underwrite an estimated \$7,500 in costs associated with the grant application if the city, for whatever reason, did not proceed with construction? (This \$7,500 gamble was on a project with a projected construction budget of \$616,000)

If we can't get our own house in order . . . it's futile to go out and portray to the public a position which is not reflective in industry standards.

Yes, marketing is an integral aspect of the practice of architecture in the 80's. Yes, there is significant competition in the marketplace between architectural firms to seek commission. Yes, there is no one generally accepted method of choosing an architect for a commission. But none of these "yeses" provides a justification for this kind of conduct. If you think it does . . . your thoughts, comments and observations are important. Direct them to any member of the WSA Board of Directors or me personally.
wisconsin architect/november 1983



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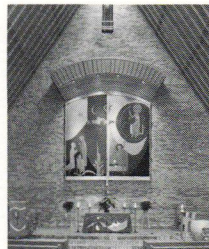
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The Wisconsin Architect is the official publication of the Wisconsin Society of Architects/A.I.A., published by Wisconsin Architect, Inc. Address all editorial and advertising inquiries to: Editor, Wisconsin Architect, 615 East Washington Ave., Madison, WI 53703; Phone: 608/257-8477. The Wisconsin Architect and WSA disclaims liability for statements by the editors, contributors, and advertisers.

NOVEMBER 1983

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COVER CREDIT:
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Religious Architecture

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Schujahn Memorial Chapel of the Good Shepherd and Spiritual Life Center
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Watertown, Wisconsin

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Watertown, Wisconsin

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Skot Weidemann

The complex surrounding this Chapel and Spiritual Life Center is home for 550 mentally retarded and physically handicapped individuals. Recent expansion saw the Home's residential facilities moving away from and consequently outgrowing its original Chapel. Affiliated with the Lutheran Church, worship and spiritual growth are basic to the Home's philosophy of care.

The principal space needed was a chapel with seating for 350 ambulatory and nonambulatory residents. Additional space requirements included an ample concourse, classrooms, and offices.

The plan places the chapel furthest from existing structures and allows the supporting rooms with a lower roof to make the link.

The significance of the design lies in the way it addresses the special needs of the mentally retarded and physically handicapped.

An abundance of artwork and stained glass communicates the Gospel and enhances the spirit of the project.

The physically handicapped have full accessibility to the Chapel. Extra wide aisles in the Greek cross plan allow an even distribution of the non-ambulatory rather than segregating them. Ramps lead to the raised altar and choir areas so that all may participate in the services.

