

From the Pittsburgh Business Times:

<http://www.bizjournals.com/pittsburgh/print-edition/2011/09/09/younger-generations-must-build-future.html>

Younger generations must build future for 'old man's profession'

Premium content from Pittsburgh Business Times by Tracy Carbasho

Date: Friday, September 9, 2011, 6:00am EDT

Related:

[Commercial Real Estate](#), [Education](#)

The recent slowdown in the architecture profession has ignited a debate about which generation will have the biggest impact on the industry's future.

Still described by some as "an old man's profession," architecture also is relying heavily on the three-dimensional technical skills of a younger generation.

"Architects ranging in age from about 25 to 35 are especially valuable because they have mastered the use of the latest technology, such as building information modeling (BIM)," said **Tim Powers**, senior vice president and principal at **Astorino**. "Pencil and paper used to be the norm for completing drawings, but the tools being used to produce the work product today are more complicated."

At age 53, Powers considers himself to be "one of the old guys" who still uses his trusty pencil and paper to design buildings rather than diverting his attention to learning the latest technology.

"Those who are in the 35-to-45 age range are emerging as industry leaders because they have a following with clients, they are confident in their work, and they understand the complex nature between design and construction," he said. "Those of us who are 45 and older are ideal for being mentors, but we will have a tougher time staying relevant in the profession."

'Old man's profession'

Sean Sheffler, a project architect/project manager at **WTW Architects** on the North Shore, is still in the younger category at age 34. When he received his architecture degree in 2000, business was booming and jobs were plentiful. Since 2008, many local construction projects have been placed on indefinite hold due to economic conditions, meaning less work for architects.

Sheffler, who chairs the Young Architects Forum of the American Institute of Architects' Pittsburgh Chapter, said many of his friends have lost their jobs in the past few years.

For example, he worked at another local firm with **Anastasia Herk**, who was laid off in June due to economy-related downsizing. Herk, who is 29 and has a master's degree in architecture, is so convinced architecture is a strong profession that she serves as a mentor for high school students who want to work in architecture, construction or engineering.

"The only reason the profession is tough now is because of the economy, and I'm hoping that will turn around soon," Herk said.

In the meantime, Sheffler noted that younger professionals must be given opportunities to utilize their skills and older individuals must remain viable in a competitive market by enhancing their professional abilities.

His own professional development has included becoming accredited in the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification standards, learning how to use a building modeling software called Revit and, most importantly, becoming a registered architect. Sheffler suggests that young architects pursue their registration and take advantage of the services offered by the Young Architects Forum, including networking opportunities, tours of construction sites and review sessions for the licensing exam.

His opinion about age differs slightly from Powers' philosophy.

"Architecture is referred to as an old man's profession for a reason — experience is always going to be more important than a series of impressive computer skills," Sheffler said. "It's unfair, but it just means that younger professionals need to work harder to prove themselves."

Melanie Buzgan Dower, a 30-year-old staff architect at Rothschild Doyno Collaborative in the Strip District, believes professionals in the 25-to-35 age bracket are in a better position than they have ever been in the past.

"As new building information modeling programs are being utilized and a higher level of knowledge is required for drafting, these young architects can find themselves in a very opportune situation," she said. "They become the translator between those who have the knowledge but do not know the software and those who know the software but may not have the knowledge necessary for proper input. Thus, they take on a greater management role and have an incredible opportunity to develop leadership skills."

A nontraditional path

Professor **Stephen Lee**, head of the School of Architecture at **Carnegie Mellon University**, views recent graduates as being the best positioned for a bright future. He believes they are capable of edging out individuals in the 25-to-35 age range for job opportunities because they are more familiar with the latest technology, including 3-D rendering/animation and computer-based performance simulation tools.

Lee said many tech-savvy young architects are choosing nontraditional career paths, a trend that coincides with his overall observations about the architectural profession.

"More services are being performed by developers, financiers and consultants before the architect is invited on to the team," Lee said. "At the back end, more services, such as design assistance and

value engineering, are being performed by the construction team rather than the architect. We're seeing more architects going to work for contractors."

Jared Friedman and **Alyssa Kuhns**, who received their bachelor's degrees in 2010 and 2009 respectively, are both working as BIM project engineers at **Massaro Corp.**, a general contractor/construction company. A lack of jobs at architectural firms prompted them to look outside the profession.

"The lines between professions, such as architect and contractor, are becoming more and more blurred due to new building delivery methods resulting from the BIM process," said Friedman, 23.

The 24-year-old Kuhns believes architectural firms must adapt to today's interdisciplinary business environment by having designers, engineers and construction managers on staff, a move that could help companies retain some of the services now being done by contractors.

"This would allow one party to handle the entire process which, in turn, would streamline the process and save money for the owner," she said.