

Architect creates second career as a teacher

Talk to Bob Fearon, senior lecturer in architecture and a Farmington Hills resident, and you get the impression he dislikes idle time.

After 30 years in the corporate world, he chose in 1988 to teach full time rather than to retire.

The Michigan chapter of the American Institute of Architects honored Fearon on Oct. 5 with the President's Award during a ceremony at the Michigan Historical Museum in Lansing.

Fearon, a practicing architect, made decisions regarding design and construction activities for Michigan Bell and AT&T International until his retirement in 1987.

Then a friend, Karl Greimel, an architecture professor at Lawrence Technological University, convinced Fearon he had too much talent and enlisted him to teach two undergraduate courses in building materials.

By the next year, Fearon had quickly immersed himself into teaching, and soon had an administrative hand in the construction systems sequence and the graduate program.

He also took on the job of education coordinator for the Intern Development program, a necessity to be eligible to sit for the architect licensing exam.

Maybe the easiest way to understand why Fearon decided to bypass a life of leisure for full-time teaching is expressed best by the man himself.

"I guess it's just in my nature to get involved," he said.

"All of us have been given certain talents in this world, and we have an obligation to give those talents back."

While working for Michigan Bell and AT&T, Fearon, along with Bob Hastings, national president of AIA, championed for the cause of overlooked architects working in commerce and industry.

The end result of this effort was "teaching, at a national level, the traditional architectural profession aware of the role of corporate architects."

Getting involved also got Fearon an assignment on former Governor William Milliken's special commission on architecture, which was charged with advising the governor on design, construction and management of state facilities.

He is also active as an arbitrator and mediator with the American Arbitration Association.

In his nine years at Lawrence Tech, Fearon has developed 16 courses.

The latest course is "Professional Awareness." He said the focus of the course will be to show the tremendous number of other career opportunities for people with architectural training and license.

"The architectural student's entire focus in their undergraduate studies is on design," Fearon said of the course.

"Design is certainly a basic tool all architects must have."

Unfortunately, there aren't that many opportunities for pure designers.

Half of all architects wind up like I did, in a field where architecture is the main focus of my job but it is not in the traditional architectural firm setting."

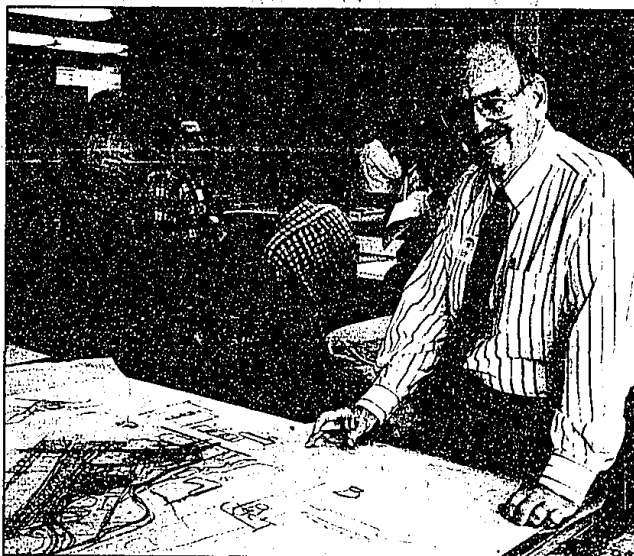
His involvement at Lawrence Tech has also taken on the duty of preparing the feasibility study of a proposed new College of Architecture and Design building.

He describes his teaching style as "tough but fair."

"I think that is part of getting the students ready for the world that faces them."

"They have to recognize that clients are tough. Bosses are tough."

"Life can be tough and you have to be prepared."



AWARD WINNER: Bob Fearon, of Farmington Hills, was just going to teach a couple of classes at Lawrence Tech following his retirement from Michigan Bell. Today he is senior lecturer. For his contributions he was recognized with the President's Award from the American Institute of Architects.

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