

5 QUESTIONS: CONNIE MCFARLAND



STEPHEN PIINGRY/Tulsa World

Connie McFarland is president of McFarland Architects, which specializes in designing health-care, education and business buildings. She is also the 2014 president of the American College of Healthcare Architects.

Inspiring through building design

Interview conducted by ROBERT EVATT • Tulsa World staff writer

1 What are some of the ways architecture has changed in the past 25 years?

Via computer software, buildings can now be represented 3-dimensionally, allowing clients to visually “drive up” to them and do a walk through before the construction documents are finished. This is extremely helpful to clients during the decision-making process and allows them to “see” what their project will look like upon completion.

Likewise, the intern architects who operate these computer programs have changed dramatically. Historically, interns are required to work for a licensed architect for three years before they can sit for their licensing examinations. I am seeing a decline in the desire of young architects to become credentialed professionals.

We’re studying this paradigm at many levels, but it is a great concern for the future of the practice of architecture.

2 What is the current level of interest in developing new medical buildings, both in Tulsa and the nation?

The recession of 2008 had a long-term negative outcome on the health-care building climate, complicated by the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. The difficulty of finding capital has really

dampened the “gleam in the eye” of those with special projects. My firm is working on medical buildings all over Oklahoma, but the volume is almost half what it was in 2006 in actual dollar volume of construction.

Not all market sectors were hit as hard as health care, however. Education is one area of practice that has grown in recent years. We just finished major projects at Riverfield Country Day School, we are currently designing a new physical therapy center for Oklahoma State University’s Langston campus and we have work underway with The University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University. So, the education sector continues to show hope for development.

3 How much freedom in design is there for health-care buildings compared to other commercial buildings? Do medical regulations keep things from getting too varied?

The trend in new health-care construction is in the area of outpatient services or ambulatory care. The regulations for outpatient facilities are not as complex. Designing environments for inpatient care is where complexities arise. In a hospital, there are many layers of oversight, from the Oklahoma State Health Department to the state fire

marshal.

Because of this, it is recommended that the client select an architect with specialized expertise in order to design a facility that effectively and efficiently meets the needs of the hospital administrators, the patients and their families. On average, inpatient buildings cost approximately twice as much as outpatient facilities. Commercial buildings usually cost even less than health-care buildings.

4 How can a building’s design facilitate medical care?

Flow is essential from the moment a patient enters the facility. Where do patients and family enter and who do they see when they arrive? Where do they wait? Are they under the observation of staff? If the patient is in a critical care facility, can nursing staff see their faces while they are in their beds? Smart designs will also consider the number of needed staff required, and site line studies will eliminate the need for additional staff, which only adds overall cost.

5 Your firm designs buildings for Arvest Bank and other businesses. What are the current trends in designs for financial institutions?

The concept of drive in-banks has been the trend for my 40 years of practice. Banks are very complicated, with the pneumatic tube systems and high-tech monitors inside and out.

Many financial institutions are now emphasizing online banking. Arvest offers all of those technology options, for instance, but its leadership also believes that their customers want to have face to face conversation to open an account or resolve an issue that might arise. Our vision statement is “Designs that Inspire Community,” and Arvest creates communities in all areas where they develop a bank facility.