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Establishing street cred

Architects, acting locally in profession's interest,
key to Repositioning success

From the AIA Oregon President

THE DOG DAYS OF SUMMER are rapidly coming to a close. If you're a football fan you are probably getting happy, if not a little antsy, about the upcoming campaign. If you're an architect (and I assume if you're reading this you are probably in that category), then you are either still massaging your market for new work, or the volume of work you are engaged in finds you frantically learning how to dog paddle all over again. For many, this past spring and summer has lent new definition to the euphemisms that characterize this profession, like "feast or famine" or "it never rains but it pours." It's at times like these when it's easy to lose sight of the forest when you're running headlong into the trunk of a massive fir tree. But that's life when you are busy keeping an architectural practice afloat and productive in today's economy.

Repositioning the AIA

In my last column, I spent a little time addressing the national discussion concerning repositioning. Some of our local chapters have taken up the discussion. AIA Portland has run a series of discussions and "happy hours" designed to elicit local response. In September, a local town hall is being organized in Southern Oregon in conjunction with the timing of an AIA Oregon board meeting. For some, it seems that this is a distant discussion that has little impact in Oregon. For others, however, it is clear that the survival of meaning in our profession lies at the core of the discussion. I'm in the second group.

For those who attended Grassroots 2013 or the 2013 National Convention in Denver, two images of the AIA seem to be emerging. The first is that AIA National is grasping the reality that there seems to be a disconnect between the national organization and the local member, and perhaps a similar disconnect between national and the local chapter. With this image in mind, the assumption is often made that it's National's problem and, therefore, National's problem to fix. More on that below. The other image that seems to emerge is that where healthy local organizations exist, or seem to exist, there is simply no urgency to address a concern about organizational health because in a world where perception is

reality, there is seldom reason to change either a satisfying perception or the reality it represents.

This is a remarkable situation. As architects, we stake our careers, our livelihood, our raison d'être, on seeing through readily held perceptions in order to define and respond to realities not easily apparent. And yet we seem unwilling to consider the trajectory of our professional livelihood beyond our immediate experience.

That brings me back to the relationship with our national professional organization. There is no need to repeat the material from the last quarter. I do sense, however, that the national organization does understand the scope of the problem and equally understands that the essence of the solution starts here. For you and I in the trenches, the issues related to society's minimizing the value of architects and their essential contribution won't get solved by a national ad campaign; rather, they get solved by incremental moves you and I make locally, establishing street cred. It is for this reason that National is emphasizing grassroots solutions. Repositioning won't happen if individual architects don't act in the interest of the profession. Not acting is not a vote for the status quo, only a vote for a trajectory that takes the profession into insignificance. What we as architects need to understand is that grassroots solutions don't happen because National issues an edict or starts a program.

Board of Architect Examiners

We are particularly pleased with the state of cooperation enjoyed between AIA Oregon and the Oregon Board of Architect Examiners. During the recent legislative session it was a pleasure to work with and support its efforts for housekeeping changes to the statute governing the practice of architecture in Oregon.

During those discussions, concerns were raised about accepted methodologies for the placement of an architect's seal and signature on documents issued for permit or construction. It was agreed that this was an issue best addressed in regulation rather than in statute.

The current methodologies involve either sealing and signing an original



Leonard Lodder, AIA
AIA Oregon President

"copy" of the documents or electronically doing the same as a software solution. No one argues with the statutory requirement that seals and signatures be placed on documents only prepared under the direct supervision of an architect. In a digital world, however, where document printing becomes rarer, it begs the questions, when is a document an original, and if it is deemed original, what distinctly characterizes it as such? It always strikes me as just a little funny when responding to RFPs, some organizations specifically ask for multiple copies and require you to stipulate which copy is the original document. They are all printed from the same digital file, by the same printer. Who is kidding who?

Finally, in a digital economy, the level of security needed to protect the integrity of a document is perhaps more of a business risk proposition. Architects should be in a position to control that integrity as a business risk decision depending perhaps on the client, or the nature of the project.

Legislative agenda

The just-finished legislative session was marked with both successes and failures from our perspective. Participation in the political process is a lesson in incrementalism. We started with a series of initiatives that seemed both logical and constructive. In the matter of the Statute of Repose, we had to settle for only part of our objective, reducing the statute of repose from 10 years to six years for large commercial work, in line with the same provisions for contractors. It seems the precedent has been set and at some future date it will become harder to argue against reduction in the multiple residential market, particularly the condo market. Cindy Robert elaborates on this and other legislative activities in this edition's cover article.

Conclusion

So much to do, so little time. ■