

Miller Dunwiddie names first woman to lead firm

BY BRIAN JOHNSON
Staff Writer

Architect Monica Bettendorf Hartberg is just the third president in Miller Dunwiddie's 54-year history – and one of the relatively few women to hold a top leadership role in a profession that's still dominated by white men.

A specialist in transportation and aviation projects, Bettendorf Hartberg took over as the first female president of the Minneapolis-based architecture firm in October after 18 years on staff. She takes the reins from Craig Lau, who is retiring after a 27-year run as president.

Though nearly a third of architects nationwide are women, they're still far behind their male colleagues when it comes to leadership positions, according to a recent American Institute of Architects survey.

As of 2016, about 45 percent of students enrolled in accredited architecture programs nationwide were women, the February 2017 survey noted. But they accounted for just 31 percent of staff members at architecture firms and 20 percent of principals and partners.

AIA hasn't tracked those numbers on a state-by-state level. But women make up 15 percent of the 76 architects in AIA Minnesota's College of Fellows, said Sheri Hansen, director of communications for AIA Minnesota. The College of Fellows is an elite group that honors AIA members who have made significant contributions to the

industry.

Bettendorf Hartberg said the industry has taken a more purposeful look in recent years at supporting work-life balance. That lends itself to more diversity and inclusion and a better work environment for everyone, she said.

Nearly 50 percent of the Miller Dunwiddie staff is female, Bettendorf Hartberg said.

"We have a diverse group with various backgrounds and ethnicities," said Bettendorf, a native of St. Cloud. "I think that's really important to have different voices at the table when we are talking about design."

Damaris Hollingsworth, vice president at Thor Design Plus in Minneapolis and co-chair of AIA Minnesota's Women in Architecture Committee, said architecture firms need to be more proactive in promoting women and minorities.

Oftentimes, women aren't considered for leadership roles based on false perceptions that women aren't as driven as men, or that they are "too nice, too emotional, too this and that," Hollingsworth said.

Renee Cheng, a professor and associate dean of research at the University of Minnesota's School of Architecture, said during a 2014 AIA Minnesota panel discussion that a lack of confidence oftentimes holds women back from pursuing leadership roles.

At the same time, there's a systemic problem that needs to be recognized, including biases in performance reviews, she said.

Thomas Fisher, professor and director of the Minnesota Design Center at the U of M, said Minnesota is home to some nationally known women architects who are leaders in the profession.

That list includes Minneapolis-based HGA's Joan Serrano, Julie Snow of Minneapolis-based Snow Kreilich Architects, and Linda McCracken-Hunt, who led Studio Five Architects in Minneapolis.

Studio Five was sold last year to Fargo, North Dakota-based JLG Architects. McCracken-Hunt was president of Studio Five Architects, and she's now a principal architect at JLG.

Though architecture has been a historically white-male dominated profession, that is "changing rapidly," and Bettendorf Hartberg's promotion is an example of progress toward more gender diversity, Fisher said.

"The number of women coming out of architecture schools is very high, so I think we are going to see a generational shift in that," he said.

"Firms are very much trying to encourage and cultivate leaders among

"I think it's (architecture) a great combination of being able to use both the left and right sides of your brain every day in what you do."

– Monica Bettendorf Hartberg, president, Miller Dunwiddie

women and people of color in their ranks," Fisher added. "They recognize that the architecture profession needs to look more like the communities and clients that they serve."

Founded in 1963, Miller Dunwiddie operates out of an office at 100 Washington Square in downtown Minneapolis. The company has 57 employees and a practice area that includes architecture, historic preservation, interior design, building envelope, and construction services, according to its website.

Though she has more big-picture responsibilities, Bettendorf Hartberg doesn't plan to ease up on her duties as a hands-on architect.

"As a leadership team, all of us want to be able to keep our fingers in design," Bettendorf Hartberg said in an interview. "We are all able to take on various areas of managing the

20
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business as well as staying involved in project work."

Bettendorf Hartberg said she has long been "fascinated" by design. Though she can't pinpoint a single "aha moment" when she chose to be an architect, she was determined to pursue an architecture career by the time she was a sophomore or junior in high school.

She enjoys the interplay of both art and science in her chosen profession.

"I think it's a great combination of being able to use both the left and right sides of your brain every day in what you do," she said.

A graduate of North Dakota State University, Bettendorf Hartberg took a job with St. Paul-based Wold Architects out of college. She stayed there for a couple of years before joining Miller Dunwiddie in 1999.

Through the years, she has worked on projects such as the Three River Park District's award-winning Silverwood Park Visitor Center in St. Anthony Village, and multiple designs for Delta and Northwest Airlines.

Her current work includes the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport's 11-level Silver Ramp, which will feature non-metallic "terracotta baguette" exterior materials and a color scheme that changes from dark and gray at the bottom to white at the top.

When she's not working, she is known to "play or coach any sport her kids are willing to try," as her Miller Dunwiddie bio notes. She lives in St. Paul with her two children, ages 11 and 13, and her husband Ben Hartberg, a landscape architect.

Bettendorf Hartberg is part of an executive leadership team that includes Mark Miller, John Mecum, Daniel Green, Denita Lemmon, Gregory Hulne, Joel Stromgren, Kathryn Hunsley and Paul May.

Mark Miller continues his role as CFO. John Mecum, a partner since the 1990s, continues as executive vice president. Chuck Liddy, also a firm principal since the 1990s, will advise the firm in an emeritus role.

Bettendorf Hartberg "is very good about working collectively" with the leadership team "to really raise the level of service that we can provide to our employees and to our clients," Mecum said. "We are looking forward to moving the firm ahead under her leadership."



STAFF PHOTO: BILL KLOTZ

Monica Bettendorf Hartberg, the new president of Miller Dunwiddie, is shown here in the architecture firm's office at 100 Washington Square in downtown Minneapolis. About half of the firm's staff members are women.