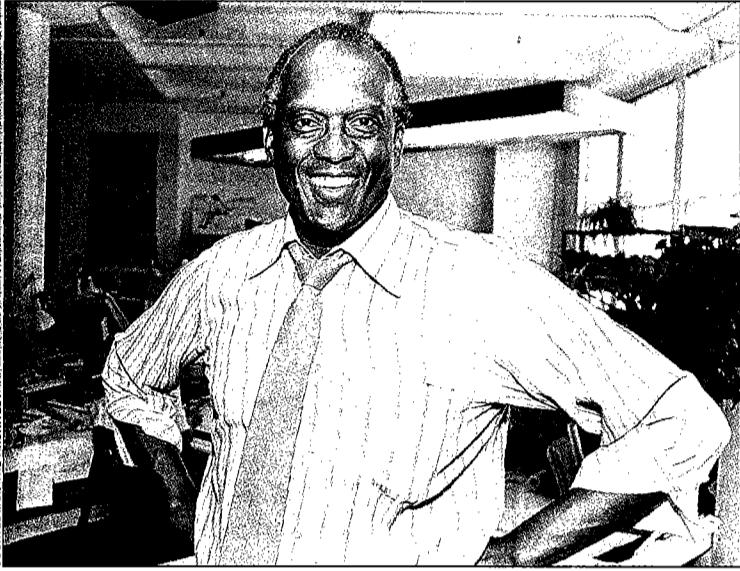


## Newsmakers

## Bridges Believes in Reaching Back



Architect Leon Bridges, FAIA, has a second full-time job: mentoring young people.

by Courtney M. Jamison

In his 40 years as an architect, Leon Bridges, FAIA, of The Leon Bridges Company in Baltimore, has found that nurturing the aesthetic skills of aspiring young African-American architects is its own reward.

The AIA's 1998 Whitney M. Young Jr. Award recipient for social responsibility, Bridges, no stranger to success, believes that helping others is a necessity. "There are so few black architects that we need to do something," says Bridges.

Fittingly, it was a speech by Young at a 1968 AIA convention in Portland, Ore., that provided "the catalyst," Bridges says, for his involvement with minority architects. In the 30 years since, that involvement has grown to include mentoring over 50 students, organizing the AIA Minority/Disadvantage Scholarship Fund, which has generated more than 500 scholastic opportunities for students, and establishing the National Organization of Minority Architects.

As if that were not enough, Bridges is also head of mentoring for the NAACP's Afro-American

Academic, Cultural, Technological, and Scientific Olympics (ACT-SO) Program. ACT-SO is a year-long enrichment program that provides role models, encouragement, and guidance to African-American high school students with which Bridges has been involved for 15 years. The program entails 24 categories of competition in the sciences, humanities, performing arts, and visual arts—including architecture. Since 1987, Bridges has mentored students—including his son—in the architecture category to several local and national gold, silver, and bronze medals.

#### Far-reaching rewards

Bridges says there are many rewards to mentoring or "reaching back" to the community.

Recalling a mentee he met seven years ago, Bridges says she initially came to him because she wanted to draw houses. Despite starting with a mediocre academic record, lack of exposure to the arts, and a poor economic background (all similar to Bridges' own experience as a child growing up in the East Los Angeles barrios), the student

worked hard under Bridges' tutelage and was accepted into Tuskegee University.

"These are the things that are the immense joys of being a mentor, and I'm most proud of that," says Bridges. The students he works with are self-motivated and hard working. "The challenge excites them. Some of the students have an interest in architecture even when their parents know nothing about the field." Bridges credits his students' parents for encouragement and for picking them up at night after late hours of work on their projects.

#### Hand selected

Usually, Bridges hears about promising students by word of mouth. After selecting one of the recommended students to work with personally, he then refers the other candidates to selected other architects for mentoring. "To be a mentor, you really have to extend yourself—you need to keep in contact with the mentees and their parents to show that you are truly interested in them and what goes on in their lives," he explains.

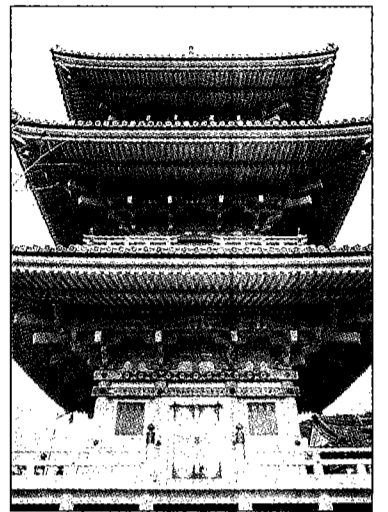
Bridges says that, on occasion, he has spent more time with his mentees than with his own four children. Nevertheless, he states proudly, all his children have an appreciation for architecture and for his work to encourage young students in the field.

#### Managing time

Another possible down side to being a mentor, Bridges says, is the time it takes from the firm. "If one is a small proprietor such as myself, any time that he gives to his mentees may possibly hurt the firm." Just as the mentees need you, so does the firm, he reminds. "There's going to be hurt either way."

Clips:  
Architects in the News

**The planet:** In light of the approaching millennium, the focus of the latest *National Geographic* is "global culture," and its accompanying detachable map devotes a section to "architecture crossing cultures." The foldout contains explanations of a number of landmark structures, including the origin of the Japanese pagoda, the modeling of American "shotgun houses," and the recent fascination with skyscrapers and their shaping of the modern cityscape. The AIA's former archivist, Tony Wrenn, Hon. AIA, contributed to this project. "We live, work, or pray in structures influenced by distant cultures," the article notes. "Some building styles are carried by the movements of peoples or religions. Others reflect our desire to celebrate different places and times."



**Milwaukee:** The mega home-improvement superstore Home Depot recently bought out all the Hechinger stores in the mid-Atlantic region, striking a nerve for many who knew and loved the institution. Across America, people seem to feel just as strongly about Home Depot's invasive and bland architecture coming to a suburb near you. In the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Whitney Gould wrote an article questioning the city of Milwaukee itself for allowing yet another "retail giant with its vast blank walls and acres of asphalt to welcome you to Anywhere, USA." The complaints, stemming from Home Depot's lack of consideration for design and aesthetic appeal, have surprised many, since in the past Milwaukee has made it a point to curb, or at least reconfigure, this sort of anonymous development. Gould concluded, "If we're going to have megastores, let's at least make sure they don't mean megabligh."

**Michigan:** AIA Michigan President Gary Skog, AIA, wrote a piece in the *Detroit Free Press* last August extolling what an exciting time it is to be an architect in Michigan these days. Not only is it a time booming with job opportunities, he says, but after a lull of more than two decades, it's a chance to practice the craft while allowing architects to hone their artistry. Skog points to certain recent projects reflecting this "eye-pleasing, spiritually enriching time:" the riverfronts in Grand Rapids, Lansing, and Detroit.

**Atlanta:** The *Atlanta Business Chronicle* offered a piece by Tony Wilbert on the expansion of the Midtown West project progressing from the Centennial Olympic Park. This winter will mark the beginning of the most important phase of the project, which is to create a "live-work-walk community village" out of the pre-existing brick buildings surrounding the park's triangle. The park is designed to resemble a European village, offering loft office space in the center, restaurants and retail space in the surrounding area, and apartments in the rear. The explosion of electronic commerce in the area has created a demand for such trendy office and living space designed to appeal to young professionals.

**Durham, N.C.:** Rita Braver, of *CBS News Sunday Morning*, reported August 15 on the battle in Durham over urban sprawl. A new proposal for a megamall in the Durham area is menacing 93 acres of untouched land and threatening more than 100 small businesses. To block this construction, Durham denizens have formed CAUSE (Citizens Against Urban Sprawl Everywhere). The group is now suing to stop construction locally and unite Americans in an effort to curb sprawl. The group's fight against "unurbanity" jibes with Al Gore's own agenda to protect "livability" and maintain green space.

—Pascale Vonier

#### Clarifications

Last month's "Member News" column (page 9) stated Steven A. Parshall, FAIA, moved to HOK's Houston office. Actually, Parshall, an HOK senior vice president, already was in Houston and has been named to HOK's board of directors.

The American Architectural Foundation's page in August (page 21) extolled the virtues of the Gaylord (Mich.) High School, featured in the *Becoming Good Neighbors: Enriching America's Communities by Design* video, but neglected to mention that the school was designed by Fanning/Howey Associates.

Our apologies to all.

#### An American Hero

**Edward H. Fickett, FAIA, 83, died in May.** A progressive and innovative architect, he designed one of the first prefab houses for manufacture, the first hotel to have private kitchenettes and patios, and the first open kitchen designed as part of the living or family room. Fickett was praised by California Governor Gray Davis at his funeral service as "an exceptional architect" who "made many beautiful contributions to his community and to the people of this great state." President Clinton also sent a letter of condolence, which was read at the memorial service officiated by Judge Joseph Wapner.

Some of Fickett's notable architectural designs included the original Sands Hotel in Las Vegas, La Costa Resort near San Diego, and the Los Angeles Harbor Passenger and Cargo Terminals. Additionally, he designed over 40,000 homes. A Lt. Commander in the U.S. Navy for five years, Fickett also served as architectural advisor to former U.S. President Dwight

D. Eisenhower. A previous speaker at the AIA National Convention, he created and participated in the "AIA University Lecture Series."

From 1977 to 1986, he was the architectural commissioner for the City of Beverly Hills.

Fickett has been recognized with the Presidential Merit of Honor Award (the only architect so recognized) and awards from the AIA; the National Association of Home Builders; *American Home* magazine; *Parents* magazine; and the cities of Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, Reno, and Seattle.

Among his last projects were the replication of the oldest fire station in Los Angeles to house the African-American Firefighter Museum and renovation of Silverlake Park. At the posthumous dedication of the park, Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan extolled Fickett's "life commitment and concern for others . . . a part of a legacy he leaves for all to emulate. His love and kindness will be missed by all those whose lives he has touched."



FICKETT