



## Press



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**Impact our World –  
Marketplace, Community,  
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Strategic Diversity &  
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New Orleans, LA  
January 13 - 15, 2011

**The State Government  
Network (SGN) Annual  
Meeting**  
Washington, DC  
February 1 - 2, 2011

**2011 Grassroots  
Leadership and Legislative  
Conference**  
Washington, DC  
February 2 - 5, 2011

**AIA 2011 National  
Convention and Design  
Exposition**  
New Orleans, LA  
May 12 - 14, 2011

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## First African-American woman to become a registered architect and an AIA Fellow

**For Immediate Release**

Washington, D.C., December 18, 2007 — The American Institute of Architects (AIA) announced today Norma Merrick Sklarek, FAIA, has been named the 2008 recipient of the Whitney M. Young Jr. Award, given to an architect or architecturally oriented organization exemplifying the profession's responsibility toward current social issues.

The award honors civil rights leader Whitney M. Young Jr., proponent of social change and head of the Urban League from 1961 until his death in 1971. At the 1968 AIA Annual Convention, Young challenged architects to more actively increase participation in the profession by minorities and women. Sklarek becomes the 37th recipient of the Whitney M. Young Jr. Award, which was established by the AIA in 1972. She will receive the 2008 Whitney M. Young Jr. Award at the AIA 2008 Annual Convention in Boston in May.

2008 AIA President Marshall Purnell, FAIA, the first African American to hold that position raised his voice in support of Sklarek, "She made me possible," Purnell said. "She is mentally the strongest person in this profession that I know. Everywhere she went she was first." AIA Board member Anthony Costello, FAIA, called Sklarek the "Rosa Parks of Architecture."

Sklarek's career has been marked by breaking barriers and expectations of what an African-American woman could do. She was the first African-American woman to graduate from Columbia University in 1950 with a BArch, as well as becoming the first registered African-American female architect in the entire nation. In 1980, she became the first African-American female Fellow of the AIA. Five years later, she was at the head of the first architecture firm to be formed and managed by an African-American woman—Siegel, Sklarek, Diamond.

In his letter of support, Jack Travis, FAIA, wrote, "Norma Merrick Sklarek's whole professional life has been a series of pioneering efforts advancing not only her cause, but the cause for minority involvement in mainstream matters of the profession and of the AIA."

After graduating from Columbia, Sklarek had a brief stint working for Skidmore Owings and Merrill, then relocating to Los Angeles to work for the Gruen Firm. During her 20-year tenure there, Sklarek completed some of her most important projects, including Fox Plaza in San Francisco, the American Embassy in Tokyo and the Queens Fashion Mall in New York. From 1980 to 1985, she was a vice president at the Welton Becket firm, where she designed the Terminal One building at Los Angeles International Airport. After that Sklarek headed her own firm for four years, and in 1989, she became a principal with Jon Jerde Inc., now known as the Jerde Partnership, where she worked on the Mall of American in Minneapolis, the largest shopping center in the nation.

"I am thankful to Norma Sklarek for being Norma Sklarek," wrote Gail Kennard, the daughter of Robert Kennard, FAIA, the 1991 Whitney Young Award winner, in her letter of support. "She is an accomplished and generous professional whose quiet determination in the face of adversity has made it seem so much easier for those who have come after her."

**About the Whitney M. Young Jr. Award**

Established in 1972, the Whitney M. Young Jr. Award has honored architects and organizations that exemplify the profession's proactive social mandate, ranging from issues such as affordable housing, minority inclusiveness, and access for persons with disabilities. The award is named after the civil rights-era head of the Urban League who confronted the AIA's absence of socially progressive advocacy head-on at the 1968 national convention. Past winners have included J. Max Bond, FAIA (1987), Habitat for Humanity (1988), Curtis J. Moody, FAIA (1992), and the National Organization of Minority Architects (2007).

**About The American Institute of Architects**

For 150 years, members of The American Institute of Architects have worked with each other and their communities to create more valuable, healthy, secure, and sustainable buildings and cityscapes. AIA members have access to the right people, knowledge, and tools to create better design, and through such resources and access, they help clients and communities make their visions real. [www.aia.org](http://www.aia.org)

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