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CHARLOTTE BUSINESS JOURNAL

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On a common mission

Architectural firm credits founder's philosophy as key

Charlotte Business Journal - by [Bea Quirk](#) Contributing writer

Architects are known to take pride in their work. At Charlotte-based **The FWA Group** though that pride is spread among the six principals, who tout their diverse strengths and finely tuned ability to collaborate as the major reasons for the firm's success over more than five decades.

They credit their philosophy to founder Scott Ferebee, who started the practice in 1953. Ferebee later partnered with Hershel Walters, naming the firm Ferebee, Walters and Associates.

Ferebee retired in 1996. But his founding principles -- which include service to clients, integrity and design excellence -- are displayed prominently in the Charlotte office.

"I give a lot of credit to Scott -- he established long ago the model for combining the strengths of a group of people, instead of being tied to a single individual," says Charlotte principal Steve McCall. The firm was renamed The FWA Group in the late 1980s.

"Actually," says Kathryn Horne, another Charlotte principal, "it takes someone with a really strong ego to take others along."

FWA's corporate structure fosters and facilitates collaboration.

"We are organized into two studios -- research and education -- so we can play to all our strengths," says President Randy Larsen. He and the other principals -- none of whom owns more than a 20% stake in the business -- have owned the firm for about five years.

Adds Horne: "Each partner has a focus, but we all overlap. It's up to each of us to get new business and build on our experience and contacts. We take advantage of technology to share work across offices."

Among its projects, FWA was a partner in the design of the Charlotte Convention Center and was recently awarded a major contract with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. "They are some of the most creative folks I've ever dealt with," says Walter Hardin, associate vice president for facilities management at Winthrop University. "They listen to what you want and translate



photo NANCY PIERCE

The FWA Group principals include Gary Lang (from left), Steve McCall, Kathryn Horne and Randy Larsen. From its origins 55 years ago, the firm has expanded into four cities, specializing in the design of educational and research facilities.

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your vision and direction into reality in an unbelievable way."

The firm has won three design competitions in the last 18 months and designed the UNC Charlotte Student Union under construction.

It is celebrating its 55th anniversary this month in a new, 8,000-square-foot main office on East Boulevard. FWA recently moved there from Bank of America Plaza uptown.

The firm works in 15 states, operating from offices in Charlotte, Research Triangle Park, Hilton Head Island, S.C., and Fort Collins, Colo, where Larsen is based.

QUICKINFO

THE FWA GROUP

Business: Architectural firm specializing in educational and research facilities

Founded: 1953

HQ: 500 East Blvd., Charlotte 28203

Principals: Randy Larsen (president), Barry Taylor, Don Van Ollefen, Kathryn Horne, Gary Lang and Steve McCall

Employees: 36 in four offices

Phone: (704) 332-7004

Web: www.fwagroup.com

2007 revenue: More than \$6 million

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