



RENDERING COURTESY SELF + TUCKER ARCHITECTS

A rendering of the Universal Life Insurance Building renovation headed up by Jimmie Tucker of Self + Tucker Architects.

Designing with a Mission in Memphis



...BY JIMMIE TUCKER

This is an exciting time for cities. Innovative leaders, policies, and strategies are driving progress in metropolitan areas and regions across the world. Memphis is no exception, and I am glad to be engaged in projects that are creating a positive impact on our communities and helping local residents reimagine a vibrant city.

What gets me most excited about our work as architects is the potential for equitable transformation — that even the most underserved areas have the possibility of becoming vibrant neighborhoods. I firmly believe that each building we design should enhance the quality of the life of its occupants and enrich the architectural fabric of the community.

Through first-hand experience I understand the challenges of engaging in community revitalization from multiple perspectives. For the past 10 years I have been architect and developer of the Universal Life Insurance Building. It is a project that has spanned the recession and three city administrations. It has been a challenging project but one that has taught me about the importance of tenacity and partnerships, as well as creative

financing and community engagement. Through an innovative partnership with the City of Memphis and with the last amount of critical funding from First Alliance Bank, the project will move forward in June 2017.

Our slogan at Self + Tucker Architects is Designing a Better Memphis. Design has the capacity to help create a healthier, equitable and just world. Recently, I have been working with various communities with a focus toward community engaged design, which is a strategy to empower local residents to be more engaged in the design process and to ultimately lead the planning and design process in their communities.

For example, the residents of Orange Mound have enlightened us about the rich history of their community as we documented the cultural

assets and gained a greater understanding of the local networks that can be leveraged to create a greater community engagement.

Mentoring and youth engagement are also critical aspects of our approach to community redevelopment. As we engage the young people the parent may also be drawn to participate in the planning process.

Essential knowledge of project financing tools as well as an understanding of

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environmental and social impact strategies and solutions can be crucial to an architect successfully executing projects in underserved communities. Through our initiative and partnership, Knowledge Quest was able to secure a Qualified Energy Conservation Bond funding of nearly \$400,000 for the Residences at Green Leaf, a project to renovate a long-vacant 10-unit apartment building.

We focus on civic leadership

strategies that place the architect at the center of creative place-making initiatives, effectively extending our influence and impact into branding, technology, public art selection and funding. However, our process has a major distinction in that we endeavor to design with the community not impose a solution based on limited information and limited engagement.

As Memphis has transitioned from commodity-based economies to one driven by knowledge, quality of place has become a key differentiator in recruiting and retaining talent. Increasingly, funding goes to projects that demonstrate highly sustainable planning strategies such as green buildings, quality urban design, transportation choices, and community benefits. Therefore, architects must gain a greater understanding of the integrated strategies required to both design and assist their clients with funding the development. They may then pursue benefits from development and place-making as a strategy for economic growth. These are the efforts that improve our hometown and help it prosper. 🌱

Jimmie Tucker is a founding principal of Self + Tucker Architects.