

## Experience Keeps Self-Tucker in Game

By Sarah Baker, *Memphis Daily News*

In the wake of the Great Recession, one local architecture firm is maintaining its focus of designing a better Memphis.

Self-Tucker Architects was founded in 1995 by Juan Self and Jimmie Tucker. Overtime, the firm at 505 Tennessee St. has grown to a staff of 20, including eight registered architects.

The full-service firm offers architecture-related services from planning to interior design. Its body of work includes the Stax Museum, Stax Music Academy, FedExForum and the National Civil Rights Museum.

Self-Tucker's experienced team helps the firm handle a diversity of projects, Tucker said.

"We want to do good work, but at the same time, we've got to be efficient and we've got to be profitable, particularly in these economic times," Tucker said. "It does make it challenging at times because we're not necessarily doing those projects on a consistent basis, but with the experience, we are able to execute them well, we just have to really make a concerted effort to plan and make sure that we are doing them efficiently."

Self-Tucker Architects, based on its established presence in the industry, has found an ideal formula for generating repeat business and referrals, Tucker said.

"We have a significant percentage of clients who are coming back having known our firm and having good experiences," Tucker said. "Particularly in these economic times, when it's very competitive, you're actually having firms that you're competing with that you didn't find yourself competing with in the past, that's at least one aspect that gives you some credibility and puts you in a better position if you were just getting introduced to these clients for the first time."

In certain cases, Self-Tucker Architects is forming strategic alliances with other firms. One example of that is the agreement it's had for a number of years with archimania, which allows both firms to come together to exceed client expectations.

"We will determine that we're going to pursue particular projects that perhaps the client may be more impressed by the number of professionals and the broad experience that our two firms can bring to a project as compared to if we pursued them separately," Tucker said. "We've had three projects now that we have teamed up, so we actually have a successful track record with that particular approach."

Another calculated move Self-Tucker implemented recently was elevating project manager Neeraj Kumar to have overall responsibility, “so that there was an alignment among all project managers” and more efficiency at the firm, Tucker said.

Self-Tucker is currently behind big deals like Cleaborn Hope IV, Memphis International Airport’s ground transportation center, Memphis Bioworks Innovation Center and the Vasco A. Smith Jr. Administration Building, to name a few.

And because Self-Tucker has four Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) accredited professionals, it’s been able to land a handful of LEED certified projects. The firm also has an active partnership with the Shelby County Office of Sustainability.

“We’re working as a consultant to help them look at ways in which they can incorporate sustainable design into the existing building codes so it would be something that might be a requirement for all new construction and renovation,” Tucker said. “So it would even have a broader impact than it currently does here in the city.”

The secret to the firm landing such high-profile work, Tucker said, goes back to the firm’s mission of designing a better Memphis.

“We talk many times about cities like Portland, San Francisco, Denver and Chicago as being leading edge cities in this regard, but if Memphis is being talked about at the same time, it puts us in a very positive light and helps in other ways beyond just the impact of there being more sustainable buildings,” Tucker said. “It helps attract people to the city and for us to be seen more as a city of choice.”

Three of its top team members are currently students at the University of Memphis with whom Self-Tucker has worked with to retain.

“Rather than leaving Memphis, they were able to stay here and continue to work for us and continue to have a very positive impact on our firm and the city as a whole as well,” Tucker said.

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