

Building for Memphis' Boom

When Memphis-born Jimmie Tucker was a boarding student at the Lawrenceville School, in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, he'd take the train into New York City and marvel at the skyline that was "worlds different from Memphis." Now he's back home, 30 years later, to make a mark on the hometown cityscape.

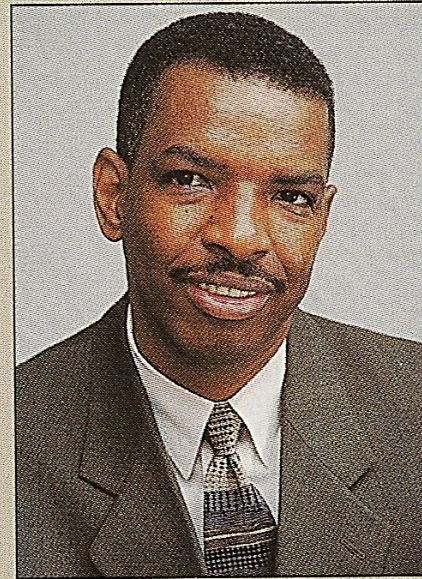
As founding partner of Self Tucker Architects, Inc. (STA), established in 1995, Tucker has made a good start. His stamp is apparent on new and renovated Memphis-area schools, churches, day-care centers, and civic, commercial, and industrial facilities. In 1997 the 12-employee firm was recognized as Best Business of the Year by the Black Business Association of Memphis. Tucker and his partner, Juan R. Self, appreciate the honor, but entrepreneurship is not the only aspect of architecture in which they strive to excel. "We're also working hard to create some noteworthy building designs," Tucker says.

Tucker has been striving to excel at least since he was an eighth-grader, when he won a

prep-school scholarship to Lawrenceville. Another scholarship took him to Princeton, where he graduated in 1977 with a bachelor's degree in architecture and urban planning. He applied to several graduate programs in architecture, but an encouraging phone call from former architecture dean Constantine E. Michaelides, (now dean emeritus), sold him on Washington University.

Tucker thought he had acquired the discipline back east to excel at Washington U., but he was wrong: "I had to really apply myself," he says. By the time he received his master's degree in 1981, Tucker had developed a drive for self-directed continuing education, a taste for all aspects of architectural practice, and a passion for hands-on experience.

For the next 10 years, he assumed positions of increasing responsibility in St. Louis architectural firms, many of his assignments involving the design or renovation of school buildings. He signed up with a city owner-rehab program to renovate his own home and 10 others in St. Louis' Hyde Park district.



Eventually he moved to New York City and a job in construction management to solidify his knowledge of construction.

By the mid-'90s, Tucker was ready to start his own firm, and returned to Memphis, now the scene of a building boom. There he teamed up with Self, an architect of similarly broad professional interests whom he had met through a colleague. They incorporated just as Memphis city schools embarked on a \$143 million capital improvement program; Tucker's extensive background in school renovation won STA the appoint-

ment as consultant to the program management team.

The firm recently was named architect of record for the City of Memphis' new \$8 million Hickory Hill recreation complex, and is the lead firm for the preservation/revitalization of the city's Chelsea Avenue commercial district. Among STA's completed design projects are two suburban transit centers for the Memphis Area Transit Authority, a field-operations center for Time-Warner Communications, and interior and exterior renovation of (Andrew J.) Steele Hall of LeMoyne-Owen College, a 1914 structure that is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

Jimmie Tucker and Juan Self enjoy bringing what they call "unconventionally comprehensive" services to the marketplace, including being consultants to new clients venturing into entrepreneurship. And Tucker manages the firm so that younger associates are exposed to all phases of STA projects. "We try to really share our experience in design, construction, and relating to contractors," he says.

—Carol Porter