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In Person

In Person: Cheryl Creech Kersey's architectural career evolved organically over the years

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Some people are born into their profession.

Others have a seminal moment in their lives that ultimately shapes their future career.

But architecture seeped into Cheryl Creech Kersey's life a little bit at a time.

"It's one of those things that evolved," Kersey said recently inside her renovated historic office on Gray Street in downtown Louisville. "I didn't have an epiphany one day."

Kersey, who co-owns Louisville-based Kersey & Kersey Inc. architecture firm with her husband, Steve Kersey, grew up on a dairy farm in the small Henry County town of Eminence, where she joined 4-H as a kid.

4-H field trips exposed her to the sterling architecture in cities such as Chicago, inspiring something inside her that otherwise would not have been unlocked in a family of farmers and agrarians.

After graduating from the University of Kentucky with a bachelor's degree in architecture in the mid-1980s, she worked in Lexington for a few years before she came to Louisville and started at Godsey & Associates. She also earned a bachelor of science in interior design at the University of Louisville along the way.

In 1992, she and her husband joined Steve Barry in creating Barry, Kersey and Kersey. She had previously worked for Barry at Louisville's Barry Associated Architects.

"One day I was an employee, and the next day I was a partner," she said.

Eventually, the Kerseys bought out Barry's portion of the business and have been operating it with a handful of employees ever since. Kersey & Kersey ranks No. 9 on this week's list of the largest architectural firms in the Louisville area.

Kersey & Kersey specializes in architectural design for the health care, education, transportation and multifamily industries, bringing with it a knack for historic renovations and restorations.



WILLIAM DESHAZER

Cheryl Creech Kersey, co-founder of Kersey & Kersey Inc., said being personally involved in all projects is key.

That skill led them to renovate the historic site on Gray Street they call home, dropping significant money into a long-abandoned building that was severely run down and deteriorating quickly when they bought it in 1995. It previously was used as a convenience store, a bar and possibly other businesses, she told me.

The company's plate is full now as it is involved in the design of the long-planned \$39 million Hotel NuLu, a 150-room hotel that broke ground last month, and a \$12 million effort by St. Louis-based Bywater Development Group to turn the former Jacob Elementary School site at 3670 Wheeler Ave. near Churchill Downs Racetrack into apartments.

The company, which has seven employees, also found itself in the face of controversy as the designer and developer of the Delphinium Apartments inside the Norton Commons neighborhood in Prospect. The affordable housing development, which will have about 23 units, is now under construction after some Norton Commons residents pushed back against it, worried about lowered property values.

The company also has worked for years with Transit Authority of River City on several projects, such as an electric bus charging station, and has designed health care clinics and drug-rehab facilities in southeast Kentucky towns, such as Corbin and Prestonsburg.

At one point, she said, the firm had almost no business in Louisville.

"The work locations fluctuate. The project types fluctuate," she said. "(There's) a lot of multifamily housing and transportation right now, but it ebbs and flows."

And that industry spontaneity helps keep the business feeling interesting and fresh, she said.

Kersey or her husband are involved in every deal, which helps set them apart, she said.

"We don't do presentations and meet the client and then never show up again," she said. "We're in it from day one."

That personal commitment involves a significant amount of hands-on work, since the average project takes 18 months from start to finish.

She described the atmosphere inside her office as collaborative, and she doesn't feel there is the typical hierarchy among her staff.

"I'm not asking anybody to do something I wouldn't do," she said. "We're in the trenches, Steve and I, like everyone else."

Kersey took some time out of her schedule to answer a few more questions in her own words:

Describe your morning routine in a few words.

After I arrive at the office, I grab a fresh cup of coffee, check my email, my calendar, and my "to do" list. After that, my day varies.

What's the best piece of business advice you have received?

I have received several bits of advice over the years. One that stands out: "Always be polite and respectful to people, whether in a board room or on a construction site."

What was the most memorable project you have worked on?

It is hard to say which project has been most memorable. We have been very fortunate over the years to have great clients and interesting projects.

My favorite are renovation/restoration projects. For these type of facilities, we have to solve a client's problem

within the constraints of an existing facility.

If you could advise a younger version of yourself, what would you say?

Take a few business classes during college.

What are the top things you look for in a new employee?

A motivated and reliable self-starter.

What criteria must a project meet for Kersey & Kersey to get involved?

We ask these questions: Who is the potential client? Are they financially stable? What is the project type?

What's your business pet peeve?

People who do not take responsibility.

What's your favorite place to conduct a business lunch?

Jack Fry's — I love the atmosphere and food.

If you could have pursued another career, what would it have been?

Something agriculture-related.

Name one Louisville project you wish you could have worked on.

Even though the project has been abandoned, I was really intrigued with the FoodPort project that was to be built in West Louisville.

Marty Finley

Reporter

Louisville Business First

