

Five decades and counting, architect stays true to form

By JENNIFER TROXELL WOODWARD

One architectural design firm in Allentown stands firm on its educational merits, its roster of longtime employees and customers and its ability to weather tough economic times.



Robin Breslin

“Over five decades, we have carefully developed an approach to the design process that brings value to our clients and yields success,” said Robin Walker Breslin, president of Breslin Ridyard Fadero Architects. “We have stayed out of debt and run an efficient business with an attitude that we need to strengthen our reputation with every project.”

One of the company’s latest projects was awarded a “green” grant for \$2 million from the Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development. The honor is for Nitschmann Middle School in Bethlehem, a building that is expected to meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Gold standards.

The company is “re-imagining the entire site with a new school ...,” Breslin said. “It was a great honor for me and my wife Gwen, who is also an architect at our firm, to have an opportunity to design and replace the school our kids attended.”

It is quality, environmentally friendly projects such as the middle school that have secured the firm’s reputation.

According to Breslin, the family run company can boast longevity and sustainability. At least half of the company’s staff members are LEED-accredited professional architects and have an average tenure of 20 years.

Customers have remained loyal, keeping Breslin busy for decades with new sites to complement educational buildings that the firm built

BRESLIN RIDYARD FADERO ARCHITECTS

- **What:** Architectural design firm.
- **Location:** Union Boulevard, Allentown.
- **No. of employees:** 18.
- **Website:** www.breslinarchitects.com.



Zephyr Elementary School in Whitehall Township, a project of Breslin Ridyard Fadero Architects.

through the years.

COLLABORATIVE, CREATIVE

Nitschmann Middle School is one of several projects the firm has done for Bethlehem Area School District over the years.

In a statement, Joseph Roy, superintendent for Bethlehem Area School District, said Breslin “hears the client and then responds with creative ideas” while working collaboratively with other companies involved in the project and the district’s stakeholders.

“Even in difficult budget times, school districts must address critical facility needs,” Roy said, noting how Breslin met budget challenges and came through with a superior design.

\$4.6M REVENUE

Breslin acknowledged his firm is no stranger to financial hardship. He said that the last 10 years have been trying at times, specifically because of the recession and Act 1, state legislation passed in 2006, which restricted new educational projects.

During 2008-2011, the company “kept the lights on” by doing feasibility studies and renovation projects,” he said.

Today, Breslin is projecting revenue of \$4.6 million for 2016, which shows the success of a pri-

vately held company that was started in part by his father, Robert, in 1964.

The elder Breslin, now the company’s CEO, founded the firm with a partner, John Ridyard. The two left a large architectural firm to focus on the design of public school buildings. The firm remains at its initial location along Union Boulevard in Allentown.

DESIGN AWARD

Robin Breslin said the firm was not thriving in those early days.

“When I was young, I remember money was scarce,” said Breslin, who joined the firm in the 1980s and remembers that he got his start by running blueprints and emptying garbage cans.

He said one project that turned around things for the firm was in 1969-1970 when the company



Rendering of a new Nitschmann Middle School in Bethlehem, designed by Breslin Ridyard Fadero Architects. The project was awarded a \$2 million ‘green’ grant from the state.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF BRESLIN RIDYARD FADERO ARCHITECTS

Breslin Ridyard Fadero Architects did design and construction work for Labuda Center for Performing Arts on the campus of DeSales University in Upper Saucon Township.

won an award from the American Institute of Architects. It was a Silver award for best design on Whitehall Middle School.

TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN

Breslin said the firm branched out in the 1980s to do work for universities. The firm has teamed on many projects all over the Lehigh Valley and beyond.

For example, it did design work and construction for most of the campus buildings at DeSales University, including the new Gambet Center for

Business and Healthcare, Trexler Library, Labuda Theater for Performing Arts and Hurd Science Center. The firm also designed the original Lehigh Career & Technical Institute building in 1968 and was hired recently to expand and renovate it.

“There are so many sweeping new ideas in technology for educational buildings. Not everyone is in one classroom,” Breslin said. “There is a lot of flexible space, energy-efficient materials, of course, and a lot of collaborative learning.”

COMPETING ON NATIONAL SCALE

The firm also does work outside the academic arena.

Recently, Breslin was commissioned to design a new terminal and do renovations at Lehigh Valley International Airport. It also was hired to design a residence for a mountain climber in Colorado, and the house will have a view of Pikes Peak.

“The Lehigh Valley has a strong base of amazing talent,” said Stephen Behrens, a senior associate at Breslin.

“Breslin is one example of a company that demonstrates the ability of the Lehigh Valley to compete on a regional and national scale.”

PERSONAL TOUCH

Breslin said he believes that the company “ebbs and flows with the economy,” seeing recessions about a year sooner than the construction industry.

He said slow growth is the way to provide the best service to customers and help maintain a personal touch on projects.

“We are always looking for opportunities to innovate and have a positive impact on the education of students, and cultivating new leadership looking forward to becoming a third-generation business,” he said.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BRESLIN RIDYARD FADERO ARCHITECTS

The \$27 million Gambet Center for Business and Healthcare at DeSales University, for which Breslin Ridyard Fadero Architects did design and construction work.

