

## Nomination of Charles A. Wilsam, Jr., AIA

Charles A. Wilsam, Jr., was born in 1928 and has dedicated his life to family, country, and profession. The son of a mason, Charlie was exposed to design and construction at a young age, when he worked with his father as a brick tender. After graduating from Cathedral High School in 1946, Charlie began the study of Architectural Engineering at the University of Nebraska.

The first in his family to attend college, Charlie worked in construction as a laborer and a brick tender and in time was accepted into the Bricklayers' Union as an apprentice—earning the money to pay for his college education and gaining valuable experience upon which to build an architectural career. As a university student, he benefited greatly from mentoring by Linus Burr Smith and others in the College of Architecture.

His mentors increased Charlie's appreciation of the importance that others play in our lives and inspired in him a lifelong commitment to serving his community. Charlie took good advantage of opportunities that college life afforded: He joined Kappa Sigma fraternity and was involved in several campus activities. During his junior year, he met Beverly Jesse, his future wife. Accepted into the senior ROTC program, Charlie received a commission as second lieutenant in the United States Army Corps of Engineers. Charlie graduated in 1951 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Architectural Engineering and was immediately called to duty in the United States Army.

### Service to Country

Charlie's first military assignment was at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, where he was a training officer for new inductees into the Army. From there he went to Fort Belvoir, Virginia, where he completed a company officers' training course, covering all areas of operation of an engineer combat battalion. Service in Korea followed; Charlie was assigned to the Tenth Engineer Combat Battalion of the Third Infantry Division.

Charlie endured the hardships of war from October 1951 through November 1952, performing engineer combat soldier activities that included laying and clearing mine fields, disarming unexploded ordnance (potential booby traps), destroying enemy caches of ammunition, constructing division airstrips, building and maintaining roads, building bridges, and constructing defensive bunkers.

As a Platoon Leader for Company D, Tenth Engineer Combat Battalion, Third Infantry Division, Charlie was promoted to First Lieutenant and participated in three major campaigns, including the United Nations' Summer-Fall Offensive 1951, the Second Korean Winter, and the Korean Defense 1952.

During his deployment in Korea, Charlie honed the design and management skills that would serve him later in life. In addition to commanding his platoon, Charlie directed the work of more than 150

## Biographical Data

Charles A.  
Wilsam, Jr. AIA



Korean nationals responsible for numerous special construction projects, including construction of bridges and airstrips, and the Third Infantry defensive battle positions.

In 1952, the United States Army recognized Charlie for his leadership and dedication with an **Award for Valor and Commendation Ribbon**.

### Family

Shortly after his discharge from the Army, Charlie married Beverly Jesse. Since then, even through the challenges of starting a career in architecture and growing a business, Charlie's family always came first. Through the years, Charlie and Beverly have been a team, both in marriage and in starting and building an architectural firm.

When his three daughters were growing up, Charlie actively guided and encouraged them. All three graduated from college; two earned masters degrees. Of all his accomplishments, Charlie is most proud of the success of each of his daughters in *all* their important roles—as professionals, wives, mothers, and contributing members of society. The three accomplished Wilsam daughters are

- Jessalyn, Senior Vice President, RoboBank, San Francisco, California
- Valerie, President, "Directly from the Heart," Omaha, Nebraska
- Adrienne, High School English Teacher, Davis, California

### Profession

Charlie began his professional career with Leo A. Daly Company (LADCO) in 1953, working his way up through the ranks to become a team captain in the mid-1950s. He was responsible for a number of major projects, including Crossroads Mall, the first major indoor shopping mall to be constructed in the region, on the corner of 72<sup>nd</sup> and Dodge Streets in Omaha. Leo A. Daly, Jr., was an important mentor in the growth and development of Charlie's career in architecture.

In January 1963, Charlie moved with his family to Louisiana to become the associate director of the LADCO New Orleans office. Charlie's primary responsibility was to provide design support for Boeing with its work on the Saturn V-C project for NASA, ultimately supporting NASA in its mission to put a man on the moon.

On January 2, 1965, Charlie and Bev decided it was time to build a firm of their own. After moving back to Omaha, Wilsam and Associates was formed. Soon after, Don Mullins left LADCO and Charlie doubled his staff with the formation of Wilsam & Mullins, Inc. Initial work included schools, housing, and other commercial and institutional projects. It is a tribute to Charlie that many of his early clients, such as the Omaha Public Schools, are still his clients nearly 40 years later! John Birge

### Biographical Data



joined the partnership in 1979, and by 1982 the firm had become Wilscam Birge, Inc.

### Formation of RDG Schutte Wilscam Birge

In 1989, a major milestone in the growth of the firm occurred with the formation of the Renaissance Design Group (RDG). This change merged the Omaha firm of Wilscam Birge with the Des Moines firm of Bussard Dikis. The Omaha office officially became RDG Wilscam Birge, Inc.

Charlie had a vision of sustained growth and abundant opportunities for the partners and employees of his firm. Thus a longtime objective was achieved as this merger made possible broad-based ownership of the firm. Today, more than more than 70 percent of RDG employees are partners and stockholders with ownership interest in the Renaissance Design Group.

RDG Wilscam Birge, Inc., took another leap ahead in 1993 when it merged with Roger Schutte and Associates to become RDG Schutte Wilscam Birge. The merger joined two growing and successful longtime Omaha practices into a firm that serves clients nationally.

In 1995, RDG Schutte Wilscam Birge was named AIA Nebraska's 1995 Firm of the Year in recognition of continuing excellence in architectural design and service to the community and the profession. With offices in Omaha, Des Moines, Chicago, Fort Myers, and Iowa City, the Renaissance Design Group serves clients nationwide and here in the heartland. The firm's broad background includes civic, religious, restoration, sports/recreation, governmental, educational, retirement, medical, industrial, and corporate planning and design projects.

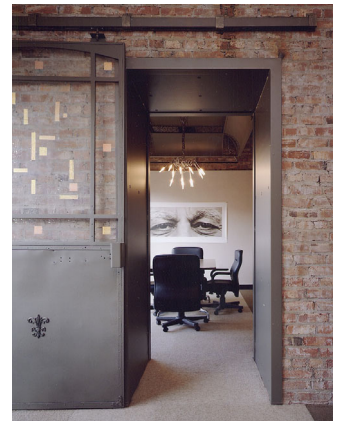
In addition to receiving more than 100 local, regional, and national design awards, RDG and its leadership have earned major recognition from many quarters, including

- American Institute of Architects, Nebraska Chapter, 1995 Firm of the Year
- Blue Chip Enterprise Award from the United States Chamber of Commerce
- Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce Top 25 Fastest Growing Companies, 2003
- Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce Golden Spike Award for outstanding contributions to Omaha's economy

Since starting out as a sole proprietor in 1965, Charlie Wilscam has been vital to the growth and development of a company that now has billings over \$10,000,000 annually, with projects throughout the United States.

Today, Charlie's focus has shifted to the legacy he leaves his

## Biographical Data



colleagues. In addition to successfully transferring his ownership and leadership within RDG, Charlie has now taken up the challenge of transferring his vast knowledge to aspiring young professionals.

As “Chancellor of RDG University,” Charlie is responsible for continuing education and professional development within RDG. As continuing education requirements have evolved in Nebraska, Iowa, and throughout the United States, he has navigated the RDG family through the ever-changing requirements of the various government entities involved.

Charlie has worked to develop a comprehensive continuing education program for staff, covering all aspects of professional practice, including programs on matters as diverse as cabinet details, integration of building mechanical and electrical systems, building-code requirements, professional practice, and firm leadership. Through his efforts, RDG Schutte Wilsam Birge is a registered AIA/CES provider. Some of his accomplishments in the continuing education area include:

- Organizing and presenting annual one-day programs with participants from all offices. Each year, there is a “Technology Saturday” and “Design Saturday” that are eligible for CEU credits.
- As “Chancellor” of RDG University, developing an outline of continuing education programs for each unit’s staff development.
- Organizing and outlining the program for the “RDG Schutte Wilsam Birge Leadership Event.” This was a year-long, four-part series of two-day workshops in leadership transition for the partners and stockholders of Schutte Wilsam Birge.
- Tracking the continuing education requirements of the numerous states where RDG Schutte Wilsam Birge staff members are registered (36 at this time) and assisting staff professionals in meeting those requirements through local opportunities or correspondence courses and workshops.
- Organizing monthly continuing education classes in the Omaha office that cover the full range of required subjects including HSW requirements.

In addition to his professional interests, Charlie is an accomplished woodworker and artist. In 1997, the Nebraska Art by Architects’ Merit Award was given jointly to Robert Krupa and Charles A. Wilsam, Jr., at the annual AIA State of Nebraska Conference.

## Biographical Data

## **Wilscam Receives Gold Medal**

Charles Wilscam , AIA, of RDG Planning and Design has been awarded the Harry F. Cunningham Gold Medal for Architectural Excellence in the State of Nebraska. The award was presented at the Vibrant x Design - AIA Nebraska Tribute to Architecture Banquet September 24.

The medal commemorates the achievements of Harry F. Cunningham who took over the Nebraska State Capitol project after the death of architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue. It was Goodhue's building design that won the nationwide 1920 contest to determine the look of the new capitol. Cunningham subsequently established the first school of architecture at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The Gold Medal is the highest honor that AIA Nebraska can bestow and is awarded in recognition of the most distinguished achievement in architecture or service to the profession of architecture in the State of Nebraska.

“We are fortunate in the profession of architecture to be blessed with many talented and creative practitioners. Every once in a while a person comes along who not only achieves professional and personal success but also inspires others to the highest standards of professional endeavor and community service. Charles Wilscam is such an individual,” said nominator Joe Lang, AIA, of RDG Planning and Design.

Charles A. Wilscam, Jr., was born in 1928 and has dedicated his life to family, country, and profession. The son of a mason, Charlie was exposed to design and construction at a young age when he worked with his father as a brick tender. The first in his family to attend college, he graduated in 1951 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Architectural Engineering, University of Nebraska. Accepted into the senior ROTC program, Charlie received a commission as second lieutenant in the United States Army Corps of Engineers and was immediately called to duty in the United States Army to serve his country during the Korean War.

Wilscam began his professional career with Leo A Daly in 1953, becoming a team captain in the mid-1950s. Leo A. Daly, Jr., was an important mentor in the growth and development of Wilscam's career in architecture. Wilscam founded an architectural practice in 1965 that through growth and merger has become RDG Planning and Design. This architectural, planning, and landscape architecture firm, with offices in Omaha, Chicago, Des Moines, Coralville, and Ft. Myers, today has more than 150 employees. Wilscam has been instrumental in mentoring many young architects, emphasizing the importance of superlative, principled service to their clients and the necessity of giving back to the community.

From his award for valor during his service in Korea, to his more recent recognition from the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society as 2001 Volunteer of the Year, he has quietly participated in leadership positions for a number of civic organizations, including Goodwill Industries, the Landmarks Commission, the Boy Scouts of America, the City of Omaha Building Board of Review, the Plumbing Board, the 2000 IBC Non-Structural

Code Review Committee, and, recently, the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society; including president of the Omaha & Nebraska Chapter of the AIA.

Wilsam and his wife, Beverly, have raised three daughters. His concern for employees and their families has played an important part in the development of the RDG culture.

Beyond all his commendable personal and professional accomplishments, Charlie's greatest feat is the lasting legacy he has created through the mentoring of young architects, instilling in them a passion for their profession and enthusiasm for community service. His guidance has been vital to the success of his firm and the many lives he has touched.

### **Architects' Responses:**

"Charles A. Wilsam Jr. is the best representation of a professional architect in that he always has the interests of others first and foremost. He strives to promote excellence in quality as well as economy in solving the clients needs. He is dedicated to promoting the quality of Architecture in the State of Nebraska by continuing to develop leaders in his own firm." said Michael A. James, AIA, President, AIA Nebraska.

"Charlie's life and professional career is an example to all, showing a beautiful balance between commitment to his family, service to his profession, and service to his country. Not only has Charlie fostered a successful firm that produces great architecture, but he is a hands on mentor to young architects thereby raising the bar for our profession into the future." Harry F. Cunningham Recipient, Deon Bahr, FAIA, Bahr Vermeer Haecker.

"Charles Wilsam provides a wonderful example of quite, yet extremely effective, mentorship and leadership within our profession. A true gentleman who has also served his country and community through decades of selfless contributions. Charles Wilsam is an ideal role model for our aspiring young professionals through his personal character, leadership and impeccable ethical standards." Wayne Drummond, FAIA, Dean, College of Architecture, University of Nebraska

# THE NEBRASKA ARCHITECT



AN AIA PUBLICATION  
3RD QUARTER  
2004

## NEBRASKA SUBMISSIONS SET NATIONAL STANDARD

Jury members of the AIA Nebraska Design Awards Program met at the Smith-Miller + Hawkinson firm in New York City, August 4, 2004. An entire day was spent reviewing this year's 114 entries submitted by Nebraska architects. AIA Nebraska Executive Director, Sara Kay was

"IN ADDITION TO VERY REAL AND SUBSTANTIATIVE ARCHITECTURAL "DESIGN EXCELLENCE", THE ENTRIES' GRAPHIC PRESENTATIONS AND PHOTOGRAPHY WERE REMARKABLE – COLLECTIVELY THE SUBMISSIONS SET A STANDARD FOR THE NATION," – HENRY SMITH-MILLER, AIA, OF HENRY SMITH-MILLER + HAWKINSON.

present and assisted with presentation of entries. New York jury members included: Henry Smith-Miller, AIA, Smith-Miller + Hawkinson, Jury Chair; Ronnette Riley, FAIA, Ronnette Riley Architects; Bartholomew Voorsanger, FAIA, of Voorsanger Architects, P.C. "Jury members benefited from the process and with each entry they were continuously amazed by the quality of work presented," said Sara Kay. Kay added recommendations from the jury to improve the submission process will be implemented.

AIA Nebraska, a Society of the American Institute of Architects, will present 5 Honor Awards and 13 Citations at this year's Tribute to Architecture Banquet, September 24, at the Van Brunt Visitors Center, UNL, Lincoln. Reservations must be made in advance.

CDs containing the submissions are available at AIA Nebraska for \$15 +shipping/handling/tax.



JURY MEMBERS DELIBERATE IN NEW YORK: BARTHOLOMEW VOORSANGER, FAIA, OF VOORSANGER ARCHITECTS, P.C.; RONNETTE RILEY, FAIA, RONNETTE RILEY ARCHITECTS; HENRY SMITH-MILLER, AIA, SMITH-MILLER + HAWKINSON, JURY CHAIR.

## Vibrant x Design

AIA Nebraska State Conference  
Cornhusker Hotel, 333 South 13th street, Lincoln  
23-24 September 2004

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 23

8:00 am

Golf Outing / Wilderness Ridge  
1800 Wilderness Ridge Place, Lincoln  
www.wildernessridgegolf.com  
402/421-2525

6:30 – 8:30 pm

Welcome Reception  
The Loft at the Mill, 800 P Street, Lincoln  
Critique of Selected Entries  
AIA NE Jury Members  
www.loftatthemill.org  
Sponsored by Standard Digital Imaging

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 24

8:00 am

Breakfast sponsored by Paxton & Vierling Steel  
Changing Faces of Architecture  
Ronnette Riley, FAIA, Ronnette Riley Architect, New York

1:00 pm  
Henry Smith-Miller, AIA, Smith-Miller + Hawkinson Architects, New York

6:30/7:30 pm  
Design Awards/Architecture Tribute  
Van Brunt Visitor's Center, 313 South 13th, UNL

Register by Calling 402/472-1456

## Wilscam Receives Gold Medal

Charles Wilscam, AIA, of RDG Planning & Design has been awarded the Harry F. Cunningham Gold Medal for Architectural Excellence in the State of Nebraska. The award was presented at the Vibrant x Design – AIA Nebraska Tribute to Architecture Banquet September 24.

The medal commemorates the achievements of Harry F. Cunningham who took over the Nebraska State Capitol project after the death of architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue. It was Goodhue's building design that won the nationwide 1920 contest to determine the look of the new capitol. Cunningham subsequently established the first school of architecture at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The Gold Medal is the highest honor that AIA Nebraska can bestow and is awarded in recognition of the most distinguished achievement in architecture or service to the profession of architecture in

SEE "CUNNINGHAM" ON PAGE 2

### THE NEBRASKA ARCHITECT'S NEW LOOK

"The new design calls attention to typographic nuance and communicates hierarchy through space and form, without the use of ornamentation. The process for manufacturing the natural-colored, uncoated paper is more environmentally friendly than coated, brilliant white, paper." – David Kadavy, Graphic Designer



2004 HARRY CUNNINGHAM  
RECIPIENT, CHARLES WILSCAM, AIA,  
RDG PLANNING & DESIGN

## INSIDE

- 3 Chapter News
- 5 State News
- 7 Continuing Education

“WE ARE FORTUNATE IN THE PROFESSION OF ARCHITECTURE TO BE BLESSED WITH MANY TALENTED AND CREATIVE PRACTITIONERS. EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE A PERSON COMES ALONG WHO NOT ONLY ACHIEVES PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL SUCCESS BUT ALSO INSPIRES OTHERS TO THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL ENDEAVOR AND COMMUNITY SERVICE. CHARLES WILSCAM IS SUCH AN INDIVIDUAL.”

– NOMINATOR JOE LANG, AIA, OF RDG PLANNING & DESIGN.

## Cunningham

the State of Nebraska.

Charles A. Wilscam, Jr., was born in 1928 and has dedicated his life to family, country, and profession. The son of a mason, he was exposed to design and construction at a young age when he worked with his father as a brick tender. The first in his family to attend college, he graduated in 1951 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Architectural Engineering, University of Nebraska. Accepted into the senior ROTC program,

Charles received a commission as second lieutenant in the United States Army Corps of Engineers and was immediately called to duty in the United States Army to serve his country during the Korean War.

Wilscam began his professional career with Leo A Daly in 1953, becoming a team captain in the mid-1950s. Leo A. Daly, Jr., was an important mentor in the growth and development of Wilscam’s career in architecture. Wilscam founded an architectural practice in 1965 that through growth and merger has become RDG Planning & Design. This architectural, planning, and landscape architecture firm, with offices in Omaha, Chicago, Des Moines, Coralville, and Ft. Myers, today has more than 150 employees. Wilscam has been instrumental in mentoring many young architects, emphasizing the importance of superlative, principled service to their clients and the necessity of giving back to the community.

From his award for valor during his service in Korea, to his more recent recognition from the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society as 2001 Volunteer of the Year, he has quietly participated in leadership positions for a number of civic organizations, including Goodwill Industries, the Landmarks Commission, the Boy Scouts of America, the City of Omaha Building Board of Review, the Plumbing Board, the 2000 IBC Non-Structural Code Review Committee, and, recently, the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society; including president of the Omaha & Nebraska Chapter of the AIA.

Wilscam and his wife, Beverly, have raised three daughters. His concern for employees and their families has played an important part in the

development of the RDG culture.

Beyond all his commendable personal and professional accomplishments, Wilscam’s greatest feat is the lasting legacy he has created through the mentoring of young architects, instilling in them a passion for their profession and enthusiasm for community service. His guidance has been vital to the success of his firm and the many lives he has touched.



### Architects Responses

**“Charles A. Wilscam Jr. is the best representation of a professional architect in that he always has the interests of others first and foremost. He strives to promote excellence in quality as well as economy in solving the clients needs. He is dedicated to promoting the quality of Architecture in the State of Nebraska by continuing to develop leaders in his own firm.”** said Michael A. James, AIA, President, AIA Nebraska.

**“Charlie’s life and professional career is an example to all, showing a beautiful balance between commitment to his family, service to his profession, and service to his country. Not only has Charlie fostered a successful firm that produces great architecture, but he is a hands on mentor to young architects thereby raising the bar for our profession into the future.”** Harry F. Cunningham Recipient, Deon Bahr, FAIA, Bahr Vermeer Haecker.

**“Charles Wilscam provides a wonderful example of quiet, yet extremely effective, mentorship and leadership within our profession. A true gentleman who has also served his country and community through decades of selfless contributions. Charles Wilscam is an ideal role model for our aspiring young professionals through his personal character, leadership and impeccable ethical standards.”** Wayne Drummond, FAIA, Dean, College of Architecture, University of Nebraska.

IN ADDITION TO ARCHITECTURE AND HIS FAMILY, CHARLIE HAS BEEN COMMITTED TO HIS COUNTRY. HE IS PICTURED HERE DURING HIS SERVICE IN KOREA, 1951.