

2012 IS OUR YEAR FOR OPTIMISM



I recently had the opportunity to visit a second year design studio at the School of Architecture at UNC Charlotte. There in the middle of the chipboard models, unpolished sketches, and Apple laptops, I was impressed by how much enthusiasm and optimism there is among these future architects. It's almost as if they don't know what's going on in the design and construction industry right now. Could they be unaware that we're coming out of the worst recession in the modern history of our profession? Or maybe they just choose to look forward rather than back, with an optimism that ignores the past and simply looks to the future. What a wonderful concept!

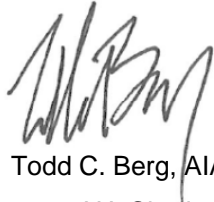
If you think about it, even seasoned professionals have plenty to be optimistic about in 2012. Sure, the last three or four years have been very difficult for architects, but we've been through recessions before, and we know that they always end - eventually. If we take a snapshot of AIA Charlotte today, momentarily ignoring the recent past, we should be hopeful. The Architect's Billing Index is up for the 3rd straight month, and is in positive territory. AIA Chief Economist, Kermit Baker recently reported that "Firms are expecting modest growth in 2012." Firms in the South are reporting a sharp upturn in revenue, and are performing better than in any other region in the country. Within the Charlotte Section, we have 765 members, and our organization is financially sound with healthy cash reserves. Admittedly, it takes enormous effort to be optimistic these days, but it's time to try. Whether we like it or not, others are watching us for signs of hope. Contractors call us regularly for updates, and the aforementioned ABI is now tracked by Bloomberg, Reuters, and the Wall Street Journal as an economic indicator. They all want us to be hopeful and optimistic. And within AIA Charlotte, we are.

Some of our members are "Fostering the Next Generation" by engaging, exciting, and enlightening High School students about professions in the design and construction industry. This group has also created healthy mentoring partnerships with senior-level, mid-level, and emerging professionals. They are optimistic about the next generation of architects, and the profession that we will leave them. We have another group of AIA members working to push sustainability, offering a series of high level continuing education courses focusing on the tenets of the 2030 Challenge, and taught by experts from across the country. They are certainly optimistic about the profession, and the impact our members can have on the environment. Our members focusing on the "Engage the Public" initiative have collaborated with local Art Museums to offer public events that focus on films about architecture and design, as well as lectures with national and international architects. They are optimistically spreading the word about the value of architects.

Amidst our optimism within AIA Charlotte, be assured that we have not forgotten that there are many of our colleagues that remain unemployed or under-employed, and we are continuing to advocate on their behalf. Representatives from AIA Charlotte will attend the AIA Grassroots Leadership Conference in Washington DC in March, where we will meet with legislators and discuss issues affecting the profession. Our North Carolina Legislative Day will be held in Raleigh in June to do the same thing with our State representatives. And locally, we have initiated a "Lunch on Us" program to keep unemployed architects engaged with the profession by offering them attendance at our lunch meetings at no charge.

Many of us are already hard at work securing our leadership position in the design and construction industry, and promoting the value of architects. It's time to forget the past and celebrate our profession again. At AIA Charlotte, we are optimistically moving forward! Come join us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Todd C. Berg". The signature is stylized and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being prominent.

Todd C. Berg, AIA

2012 AIA Charlotte President