

President's Message

By Michael Malinowski, AIA



A Fire in my Belly as I Re-define Success

President! I feel like someone tossed me the keys to a classic 65 year old car, a powerful baby with 843 people power. What a great time to be stepping into this place. I have an incredible team – continuing board members Maria Ogrydziak, Jeff Reilly, Craig Hausman, joining us Ron Vrilakas, Bob Chase and Brian Crilly, and my super Executive Committee with Matthew Shigihara, Bruce Monighan, and Carl Lubawy. With the honorable Don Comstock, FAIA as our Executive Director, and with Jennifer and Kim our incredible staffers, we're poised for a year of adventure, fun, learning, socialization, and championing the business and art of architecture.

For a start, I hope I'll see you our kickoff event – a “Gratitude with Attitude” party that my good friend, contractor, and affiliate member Steve Grendahl is hosting with myself to kick off our new office project with a bang. Expect a whole series of events to unfold in that incredible space as the year progresses. With the year's Firm Principal Roundtables, Golf and Tennis Tournaments, Code Conversation program, Design Awards, numerous building tours and more, there will be many chances to cross paths. I hope over the next year to connect with hundreds of members, and given my proclivity with names, with extra diligence I may well be able to add three or four new names to my memory.

Of course, these are also turbulent times with the economy shifting so quickly. Challenges ... and opportunities – now doesn't that sound just like a design problem?

And WHO are we? At our core, we're Architects and architectural allies. We share a keen interest in places and spaces - and a more than passing interest in people. A great many of us consider ourselves designers, with a secret belief that, if entrusted to us, most problems would end up better solved. We are optimistic, with egos tempered by humanity and, on occasion, a touch of humility.

Whether from big business or small, we each seem to have a thoughtfulness in our decisions – probably because we've discovered that in shaping the built world mistakes can last a long time. We're a collection of idealists and individualists, artists and curmudgeons, loners and laughers. While some are a bit paranoid that in sharing too much our secrets will be spilled, we also realize that not only do we NOT have many secrets; we've more to *learn* together than we do to *lose*. Most of us are passionate, with what I like to call a “fire in our belly” that helps us face a world that often cares less about places than we do.

Consider for a moment the miracle of what we do – from a vision we go through a short and intense period of drawing to crystallize it with a small team, along the way carefully balancing dozens of conflicting considerations like cost, safety, function, regulations.

We arrive at a drawing package that must direct hundreds of trades people, most of whom have never met, who gather in rain, cold, or blistering heat to craft a huge vessel – and around every corner along the way lurks conflict, confusion, change orders, litigation, wailing and moaning. Egad.

And **what does success look like?** A building, if successful, is expected to serve the needs of people the designers have never met, allowing them to do things that were never envisioned safely and effectively, in an artificial environment that must be sustained with high efficiency for dozens, perhaps hundreds of years ... with beauty and grace. For this work we are paid as technicians, sued for almost anything that goes wrong, thanked rarely except by ourselves. When we finish one building, we pick ourselves up off the floor and do it again, driven by Passion and focus – and that darn *fire in the belly!*

My mission for the year? Completing the move of the chapter office, bringing our organization to new levels of activity and financial health, is obvious and essential. And of course, there is the fun and camaraderie of our steady stream of events. But I have a bigger idea that arises from that fire in my belly. **I would like to redefine success – as it relates to our work and our organization.**

Consider what design success has come to mean in our community. An active public is engaged in the process, anxious to direct their energy toward the choices in shaping buildings, their details, form and color – and ready to raise hell with their elected and appointed officials when they don't get what they want. *Design success* in this environment has come to mean *design without complaints*. As diverse as we are, with so many perspectives and tastes – imagine the buildings that can be built to which NO ONE will object. The least common denominator easily can become mediocrity! Is this the future our community wants? Do we not, on more than an occasional basis, need buildings that challenge, inspire, and delight even if in doing so, a few are going to be offended? I believe we need to help redefine **successful design**. It is NOT design that generates NO complaints. It is **design that enriches our fabric as a city and touches our spirits individually.**

And how do we define success as an organization? Traditionally, just like in the political environment of a city, success for the AIACV has meant to operate with minimal complaints - to offend no one. This has led the organization over the years to so often be silent when it comes to those changes that shape our environment and our community because as diverse as we are, it is typical to have members of the AIACV on each side of each question. Can we be relevant to the broad community if our prime directive is to have no one complain? In my own tenure on the Board over the last six years, we've grown a bit more broadly caring and fearless. In fact, we've begun to adopt one of my own personal mantras, "If you're not in the room, you're not in the deal." The AIACV is now in the room. We are getting in the deal. Our job as an organization is **Not** to weigh in on what design is good or bad – there are too many forces in our community already doing that who are quick to tweak designs from the sidelines, adding conditions and mandates. **I believe that one key measure of success as an organization is simple –**

we must defend with passion and vigor the work of our Architect members in creating design that matters.

Whew! I'm glad I got that off my chest! Join me next month for how I see us moving toward these new definitions – and in the meantime, drop me an email!

Mike Malinowski, AIA