## An Interview with William Snyder

An Oral History conducted by Claytee D. White

The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV Libraries University of Nevada Las Vegas ©The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2007

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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project. Additional transcripts may be found under that series title.

> Claytee D. White, Project Director Director, Oral History Research Center University Libraries University Nevada, Las Vegas

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### Preface

In 1978 Bill Snyder came Las Vegas for a heavyweight championship fight between his homeboy, Larry Holmes and Ken Norton. During that visit, he saw cranes dotting the cityscape so he returned home and proposed that the family move across country and settle in the desert. His wife, Joy, gave him a year. And as they say, the rest is history. And what am amazing history it is.

In this interview, Bill Snyder talks about his life from its beginning in Easton, Pennsylvania, where he discovered the challenge of architecture first by perusing books in the library and then by hands-on construction experience. But his love of art built the foundation to this treasured craft that has allowed him to design homes, office buildings, airport terminals and the McCaw School of Mines on the campus of McCaw Elementary School in Henderson, NV. The projects that Mr. Snyder seems to prize most are those that include the imagination of children. The people who shaped his life are introduced and the impact of his military training is wonderfully expressed. His connection with young people is paramount throughout the oral history that is beautifully documented with images of many of the projects that displayed children's art in an exciting way.

Bill and Joy are the parents of two sons. Dana age 36, lives with his wife Christine in Hollywood, California, and works as a voice actor best known for his role as Master Shake on the cartoon *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*. Their younger son, Mike age 31, owns The Krate, a clothing, music, and art shop in Santa Cruz, California, where he lives with his wife Mandy and daughter Maya.

A husband, father, sports car enthusiast, runner, thinker and lover of teaching and trusting young people, Bill Snyder is a brilliant architect and manager of people. He is dyslectic and never expected a school to be named in his honor but the William E. Snyder Elementary School was dedicated in 2001 with overwhelming community support. One of his current goals is to dream an architectural project that rivals the McCaw School of Mines for his own school.

I trust that you will learn to love architecture in a different and very profound way as you read this interview just as I did during my conversation with Bill.

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The Snyder Family

I'm Claytee White. And this is November 21st, 2008. And I'm in the office of --Bill Snyder.

### Bill Snyder is with which firm?

Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects.

Thank you so very much. So how are you today?

I am fine. And you?

Wonderful. Great to be here. Tell me a little about your childhood and where you grew up. I grew up, born and raised in Pennsylvania in a place called Easton. And I grew up pretty much in a blue-collar town and a very diverse town of a lot of immigrants that migrated from New York a little bit further East. Easton is a very historical town. So we grew up around a lot of history. George Taylor, one of our founding fathers in the city of Easton, was one of the original signers of the Declaration of Independence. So never really being a history buff as a student growing up, you don't realize what you lived amongst until you move away and become interested in reading and you discover you have a love of reading history. And then you realize that you lived next to it and you never took advantage of it.

### So you were talking about your love of history.

Yes. And Easton is not very far, only maybe 15, 20 miles north of where George Washington crossed the Delaware. And I lived a few blocks off the college campus of Lafayette College, which was named after General George Lafayette, who was part of General Sullivan's army. And General Sullivan marched through our area. And one of the streets that's within a block or so of my home that I grew up in was called Sullivan's Trail. So all the history is there. And I'm glad I can go back and visit it now that I've read a little bit of history about it.

## Good. So do your friends, your parents, do they appreciate that history?

I don't think they do. I think people grow up in an area and you never really take advantage of what's in your own backyard. And, of course, when you're going to school as a young student, you're learning history out of a book. You're not learning about the that's history in your backyard. So history growing up to me in school was something that you had to memorize something from a book for Friday's test and you got graded on it. And that wasn't very much fun. But I think when you experience things, then you have a desire to know more about them.

And I think that part of my love of architecture started by sneaking into the Lafayette College library as a kid pretending I was a student and going off into the architectural section and just pulling books off the shelf and just immersing myself for hours going page by page and dreaming about, wow, wouldn't it be nice to be able to go to college and become an architect and do all this.

## Oh, that's great. So no one influenced you. It's just that curiosity.

The curiosity, yes. I always enjoyed building things as a kid. When you're a little kid and you build forts and tree houses, you're the one that has to figure out how to get the lumber in the tree and how to make it work. And that's kind of fun and that sort of develops. And I always loved art. I always was very good in art. I was not a very good student at all. But I made up for it with art. I just loved to draw. So I did a lot of drawing and a lot of hammering of nails. And I think as a kid growing up I used to spend a lot of time sneaking into construction sites and climbing all over everything and experiencing construction that way and working construction when I had a chance as a kid to have a job working as a laborer or cleaning up around a construction site. So I always had a love of construction and a curiosity of construction. And I loved to draw. So it became natural I think to become an architect.

## Tell me about your parents. What kind of work did your father do?

My father spent his time working -- he worked for the city. The last 20 or so years of his life he worked for the Parks Department in the city mostly outside cutting grass and repairing things. And prior to that he worked as a machinist in a machine shop. And that plant either closed down or he got laid off or something. And that's when he went to work for the city for the last 20 or so years of his life.

Prior to that my father worked for a family business. My great-grandfather started and owned a resale wholesale fish market. So a fish market was always part of our family. As a kid when Catholics had to eat fish on Good Friday or every Friday, I got to play hooky from school on many Fridays to help deliver fish on the fish trucks. So I would be out early riding as somebody's helper running orders door to door with a fish truck.

Oh, that's interesting. So growing up in a family business you had no fear of going into your own business.

Well, my father actually worked there. It was my great-uncles that actually ran it. So I guess I'm not quite sure what fear you have going -- no, I had no fear going into business. But watching my father and my father-in-law, who both worked very hard their whole lives but never really had anything to show for it -- they were both World War II veterans. My father-in-law got out of the navy after World War II and went to work for a company. And that is the only job he ever had. And every time that company reached a strike, he would go on strike with everybody that went on strike. And every time they came back. And, finally, one day the company just decided to close down. And at that point he was too old to go get a job anywhere else and he had nothing to show for it. And growing up as a baby-boomer being told you've got to study hard, you've got to work hard, there's so many people going for jobs -- and I think the baby-boomer generation became successful because we grew up with such pressure from our parents that you have to do well, and teachers, because you have so many people looking for those jobs. And so I think that was part of just something that was instilled upon you growing up, at least in our area where many of the people were factory workers and there were a lot of factories.

Some of the factories in Easton, the companies -- Crayola Crayons is headquartered in Easton. And I never had problems getting crayons as a little kid because I had aunts that worked there. Dixie Cup is another company from Easton. My first architect that I worked for; his father was the founder of Dixie cup. So it was that kind of a city. Bethlehem Steel, a lot of my neighbors worked at Bethlehem Steel. You know, Bethlehem, Easton and Allentown all sort of run together. And then there was Ingersoll-Rand, which was just across the Delaware River in Phillipsburg, New Jersey. So it was very, very industrial. That's all changed now because a lot of those businesses have moved or shut down. (Billy Joel sang about this - *Allentown*.)

But that was sort of the blue-collar community that I grew up in, hard-working, very hard-working people, and a very diverse ethnic group. It was never hard to find a good Italian restaurant or a good pizza place. It was just a great place to grow up. We knew no racial divides. We knew no ethnic divides. We had a lot of Jewish people and we had a lot of bagels. And, you know, you just grow up and you wonder growing up in the 60s where there were all sorts of riots and things other places and you grew up thinking, What is that all about? We don't have that. So I think, just growing up where you're a kid and your best friends are from all different walks of life, it gives

you a real appreciation of people. And what you don't know and what you don't understand, it is really kind of fun to be drug into somebody's house for dinner and experience a whole new kind of food that you never had or staying overnight with your friends or vice versa. It was just a great place to grow up.

It sounds like it. That's wonderful. Tell me about high school and then college.

High school is interesting. I enjoyed sports. I was the captain of my wrestling team in high school. Art was a big thing in high school. The other subjects were really not very good. As a matter of fact, I think in high school I learned how to negotiate because I did do a little bit of negotiating for my grades with painting pictures and doing artwork for teachers and convincing them that if they would just give me a passing grade I promise I would be a good person and I wouldn't hurt anybody. So I was able to exchange a few pictures. I'm not sure if my artwork was that good or if they felt sorry for somebody that was trying to make an extra effort beyond the subject matter and in some cases I was successful.

### Is any artwork in here your artwork?

Yeah. Those sketches up on the wall are mine.

### Oh, good. Wonderful. I see why they accepted it.

But it was kind of fun. I was not a good student. I'm dyslexic. I didn't realize that at the time. So I was in some special education classes when I was in elementary school. I think I did a little bit better when I was in high school because you can move a little bit different at your own pace. But my grades were not very good, not at all. But I did have some wrestling scholarships to different colleges if I wanted to take advantage of them.

### So where did you end up going to college?

I didn't go to college. I did not go to college.

### How can you become an architect?

Well, you still can in several states. When I moved to Nevada and while I was still in Pennsylvania, I was a partner in an architectural firm with three young architects. We started a design-build company called The Architectural Studio where we actually built several of the houses and editions that we designed. It was a great experience because we didn't know enough to know that you couldn't do that. We didn't have any experience. So we just said, well, we'll get it. We'll do it. So we found people that liked us enough that said, okay, we'll take a chance with you. It was a very good learning experience to be able to build things that you designed and be very close with the clients you're working for.

In one case we did a house for a young couple. He was a teacher. And he and his wife came out every Saturday and Sunday and worked with us building their own house. It was a great experience. We worked right through the winter. So his wife would tend the fire that kept us warm so we could warm our hands. Doug was his name. And he worked right along with us as a laborer. He did whatever we needed him to do and helped build his own house. And that was a great experience.

My partners and I, we worked all week in the office with whatever work we had. But this was the way for the four of us to be able to go into our own businesses. We used to get together Friday afternoons and have a couple of beers. And I worked with the architect in his small office. The other two worked at two separate offices. And we would always get together every Friday and have a couple of beers and discuss the week, what they were working on and what we were working on. And we would always fantasize about what would we have to do to start our own office and just all work together?

And I wound up finding some clients, which I was doing a house for. And I said, well, why don't we build this house and start a design-build construction company and between what little work we have as architects we'll supplement that with what little money we'll make building this house and we'll all be able to work together? And that's kind of what we did. As a matter of fact, I was just back in New York two weeks ago with two of those partners. We all got together. And this is 30 years later. And we went to Connecticut and toured the Philip Johnson Glass House together. So we still stay in close touch.

## Have you ever gone back to see one of those first houses that you did?

I do once in a while. I do. I drive by a couple of them.

### Describe one of those to me.

The first house was built in a beautiful lot in a place called Bushkill Township, which was about 15 to 20 miles north of our office in Easton, Pennsylvania [Powell House]. It was a beautiful wooded site. And we designed a house that was small because they had a limited budget. We did a little bit



of an open concept. It was a two-bedroom house. We made provisions so they could add a third bedroom at some point. But, in the meantime, the third bedroom area that we had carved out was just an outside deck. So the space was basically there. We did not have a garage. It had a carport. And the carport had a deck on top of it that was a roofed area that they could take advantage of overlooking the deer on their site, which was pretty interesting. And one whole wall was a stone fireplace that I built myself. That was fun. We gathered the stones from the site. We laid all the stones out and we handpicked each stone before we put it in. And we built scaffolding, as we got higher. I think I spent probably three weeks building that stone fireplace. And my fingers were just all sore from all of the lime and the mortar. We didn't wear gloves. We packed all the mortar --

### Do you have any fingerprints now?

Actually, I don't. I don't. But that was our first. And it was a lot of fun. And the clients were so good. It just was such a great experience for us all. And we became good friends with the clients. That was our first.

## How did you learn all the skills that I think an architect has to have? That first person you worked for, was that like an apprenticeship in the beginning?

Well, the first person that I worked for -- let me back up. That was my firm, The Architectural Studio, which I was a partner in for approximately four years before I moved here to Las Vegas, which was in 1978.

When I was in high school, I was constantly drawing. And my aunt, who I lived next door to, was an interior designer. She was a graduate of Pratt Institute. And she had worked when she got out of school for Macy's for a while and then just raised a family and never pursued the career any longer. But I remembered discovering this great book that she had. And it was called *Architectural Graphic Standards*. And I would borrow that book and I would go page by page by page. And I was just fascinated by all the knowledge in that book. And one day I came across what I thought was the secrets to the universe. And it was a chapter on how to do perspective drawings. And I taught myself how to do perspective drawings with projections of the plan. And I just thought that was the greatest thing in the world that you could draw to scale something in perspective and it was no longer just a sketch. And I did that. And so when I was in high school, I had art in high school every day.

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### Every day?

Every day. I elected art as a major, however you do that. And I had art every single day. I had a wonderful art teacher. And he was a big inspiration in my life. Anyway, whenever we had an opportunity in art class to do a free project, you could do whatever you wanted. Well, I would wind up doing these great perspective drawings, paper and ink drawings and then watercolor washes. And they were perspectives. So it would up when I graduated from high school, I had all of these perspective drawings.

I graduated from high school at 17. My birthday was like the first day of school, which was really kind of a bummer as a birthday date. Your birthday party is always the first day of school as your birthday. I mean it's wild. And being dyslexic and not really enjoying school very much -- I enjoyed art. I enjoyed people. I enjoyed wrestling. But words didn't jump off the page at me. And I had a hard time following what page we were on. And teaching back in those days was a lot of intimidation. You know, why can't you read as fast as this person or that person? And I couldn't read very well. So I developed this sort of kind of teacher-friendly class clown where I wound up having to sit next to the teacher's desk a lot. But timing is everything. And when the teacher's really mad, you've got to make sure that you she's really mad. And when she's not you can get away with a little. As long as it's funny enough for the teacher to laugh, she really can't discipline you. So I wound up in that position a lot. I sat next to teacher and painted a lot of pictures for grades. But in any case, I forget your question now.

### We were talking about teaching yourself.

Oh. Well, when I graduated from high school, I worked construction. And where the Lehigh River flows into the Delaware River, there was an old dam that was built probably back in the very early 1800s. And I got a job working as a laborer. I wasn't 18. So I really wasn't old enough to join the union. So I was just the timekeeper and the gofer. And I got that job because my uncle was the city politician. And he was able to get me that job because this large construction company from Philadelphia was working there. And that was a very interesting job this old historical dam. We were tearing it apart. We built a cofferdam to close off half the river. And we tore half the dam out and diverted the water around; working around all that. And then during the summer that was the job.

And then once the summer was over they were falling behind schedule. So they put on two shifts. Now, the day shift was a union job. The night shift was non-union. And I wound up working the night shift as well as the day shift. So I worked 16 hours a day. During the day I was the timekeeper and the gofer. And at night I was a rod man tying steel reinforcing rods. I was the youngest kid on the job. You know, even to this day I think construction workers have a tendency to take a kid under his wing. When I was working during the day with the union guys, there would always be some bulldozer operator who would grab me and throw me up on the bulldozer and say, Come on up here, kid. You see those guys in the ditch down there. You don't want to be down there when you're 60 years old digging a ditch. You want to be up here. You want to learn how to operate this equipment. So they would teach me how to operate their equipment.

Well, that was great and that was fun during the day. But at night I was the only guy who knew how to operate the equipment. And I was 17 years old. So I got to bring a load of this down with the loader or bring a load of that with that or use the dozer to do that. And I was a rod man because building a dam there's a lot of reinforcing rods and a lot of concrete work. So that was my job at night. And during the day I was the timekeeper. Then even on the weekends I was kind of the weekend watchman because I lived in the city and everybody else lived in Philadelphia. So I would drive through the job site three or four times a day. When we were curing the concrete, we would cover it up with plastic tents. And we'd have to keep heat on it because it was wintertime part of the time. And I'd have to go every few hours during the weekend and fuel up the heaters to keep the stuff going. So I worked about a hundred hours a week.

### Yes. And you were rich when you finished this.

Actually I was. I got this sense of -- actually, in that very first job I usually had seven or eight paychecks in my wallet that I never had time to cash. And I actually made more money than my parents put together. And that was my first job out of high school. So I had this really very different perspective of what life and money was all about. And I did that for probably a good year.

My uncle, the politician, tried to get me to go to school because he knew I had some talent. He was always friends with the local architect in town. And that was Hugh Moore, Jr. And he made an appointment and took me to see his friend the architect, Hugh Moore, Jr. And my uncle's idea of taking me there was to have Hugh Moore, Jr., talk me into going off to school. A great uncle. Good idea. Okay, fine. But that was my uncle's intention. Little did he know what you needed to do to get into architectural schools. But while I was there -- I took my portfolio. And Hugh Moore, Jr., was impressed with my work and said, "I could use a guy like you around here. Why don't you come to work for me and be my apprentice?"

### And what did the uncle say?

And my uncle was amazed. So I got the job. And I worked for Hugh Moore, Jr., for probably about a year and a half. I just thought that was great. Instead of going to work every day for 16 hours a day -- and that job was done anyway for me -- now I got to go to work with a suit and a tie. I mean this was pretty nice. And, again, I'm the young kid in the office and everybody wants to teach me everything. And I worked directly with Hugh. He would doodle out designs, schematic designs. And he would give them to me to refine. So I got a great chance to learn how to do some design work. It was just a very, very unusual experience.

### This is a charmed life.

It really was, although it came to an end soon.

Before we get there I want to go back and I want to know your mother and father's names. And you said something about your father's work. So I want to know about your mother's work. And I want to know more about the art teacher and that influence.

My mother's name is Eleanor Snyder. She worked one job her whole life. She started working part time at a bakery, a large bakery when she was in high school as a part-time job. I think it was in the cake decorating department or something. And when she got out of high school, she went to work there. She never left that job. Her last position was -- and she's been retired now -- my mother's in her 80s. But I think she retired when she was close to 70, 68 or 70. But for the last 12 years with the bakery she was their head computer programmer. So when they first put computerized the bakery with the data processing and all that stuff, that's what she did. And she was working long hours because she always had to go in and run all these different programs and come home for dinner. And I always remembered her having to go back after dinner to run this program or run that program. But my mother worked very hard and worked at the bakery her whole life.

You sound like your mother. I mean she probably trained herself on those computers. Yeah, she did. She did because she didn't go beyond high school. My father left high school. He got a diploma. But my father left high school during the war efforts and he joined the Merchant Marines. My father just passed away this year. When my father passed away he had a small notepad in an old ammo box that he had kept where he kept all of his insurance policies. And he never shared that with us. But that is the history of two of his Atlantic crossings during the war, which he told me once that -- I mean he never really spoke much about it. But that is full of incidences where they were being dive-bombed by German dive-bombers where ships next to them are getting torpedoed and sinking. It's a very, very harrowing account. And this is just two of the trips that he made across the Atlantic during the war. He made 17. After the war he wasn't able to work for two years.

### I guess not. Have you ever thought about writing a book?

I don't know. Well, actually, I deciphered those notes and I just made copies of them so I could give a copy to my brother and my nephews. So it's kind of interesting. I should. I should do three generations of war. My great grandfather -- I'm getting off your story line. Sorry.

### No. But I want to know.

When I went to Vietnam, my father gave me a Bible, a little Bible with a metal cover on it. They wore that in their breast pocket over their heart. And it was a Bible that my grandfather carried to the front in World War I. And it was pretty interesting because my grandfather put in the front cover where he was on which fronts in the chronology of his World War I experiences. And then my father put that back cover with his experiences through the different countries that he was in during World War II and gave me that to carry to Vietnam with me.

### And you still have it?

I do. I do.

### Oh, this is amazing.

So I'm now starting to rethink about my own history. And one of the great things -- I shared that with you about my father. My grandfather died when my father was seven years old. So I never knew my grandfather. And when my grandmother passed away, many years ago, I was given this leather suitcase that my grandmother wanted me to have because I am my grandfather's namesake. The suitcase had all the letters that my grandfather wrote from the trenches in World War I to my grandmother.

### Oh, my goodness.

And my grandmother was the little girl next-door neighbor of my grandfather. She was about 10 or 12 years younger than my grandfather. She idolized him. He was the big guy next door. And she wrote him letters and he wrote her back. And she kept all those letters. And when she passed away, she gave me one of those old leather suitcases and it had all those letters in there. And I was in the process of going through all of that, which was pretty interesting talking about the Battle of the Argonne Forest and some of the experiences that he had gone through. There were also some letters in there that he had written to his father. So I have to decipher all that.

## Oh, I can think of plays and all kinds of things. This is amazing. What is your father's name? Richard L. Snyder.

And now tell me a little about the art teacher.

Richard Fox. Mr. Fox.

### Does he know how much he influenced your life?

I don't know. I'm not sure he's still alive. Mr. Fox was a very talented guy. We had a very special relationship. He was involved with the local theater group that used the high school theater after hours. And he and my English teacher, Ms. McClay, they were big into the theater. Because I was good in art and Mr. Fox's right-hand guy, I got drafted to do a lot of work on sets and always working in the auditorium, which in itself was kind of fun because we'd be up behind the stage building stage sets and we'd have access to the catwalks. And they used the auditorium for -- they used to have study halls in those days. So we would be up on the catwalks and nobody knew where we were or what we were doing. You can just image the kind of things that you could get away with up there. So we had a lot of fun.

But Mr. Fox also did a lot of set design for Broadway theaters. So he was always working on sketches. And I remember one day he was working on this sketch, pen and ink sketch. And I came up behind him when I came into the room and I slapped him on the back. Hey, Mr. Fox, how are you doing? And the ink spilled on the sketch. And he was so angry because it was -- and he made me redo the sketch for him, which I thought at the time it was punishment. But it was good training. And I had to start it over a couple of different times. But I think that was pretty interesting training.

But Mr. Fox was very, very influential in my life. He encouraged you to just go for it. And

I think he gave me an appreciation of art in the way that -- I mean most people in the educational setting in high school, they look at art as they look at music as they look at gym. This is some prerequisite that you have to take to graduate. And he looked at it as a profession that you could have art as a profession. And I'll tell you a story that will tie into this a little later with my mentors with my kids at school about art, but I don't want to get off your story line yet. So that was Mr. Fox in school.

### Were you an only child?

No. I have two brothers. One is a schoolteacher and he just retired this year. He's the wrestling coach and football coach. So sports have always been a big thing in my family.

### So how did you leave there to come to Las Vegas?

Well, let me finish the story about my great working relationship with Hugh Moore, Jr., the architect, because this will tie in and it'll fill that gap. This would have been in 19 -- I graduated high school in 1967. I worked construction into '68. And during '68, I then went to work for Hugh Moore, Jr., the architect. And I was working for him and life couldn't have been any better. One day I got in the mail, "Greetings from the President of the United States. You are here by ordered to report to the draft." So I went in and I told Hugh that I got drafted and I was going to have to leave and go into the army. And he sat me down and he said let me give you some advice if I can. He said I graduated from Yale and the Korean War was going on and I got drafted into the army. And I went into the Army Corps of Engineers. And he said I learned more in the Army Corps of Engineers during the Korean War than I learned my entire five years at Yale. So if there's any way you can get in the Army Corps of Engineers, you should do it.

Well, this was the guy that I wanted to be one day. And that's what I did. I had a little trouble doing it. I had a little problem when I was -- one of these -- I don't know how much of this you want to get into. But as a young guy I liked to drive racecars. I always liked to drive things. Anyway, I had myself a car and it was back in the days when young people had fast cars and stuff. And I had a reckless driving ticket. Anyway, a reckless driving ticket was considered a felony. Well, I was trying to outrun the policeman. Anyway, that's another story. But in any case, you're 17, 18 years old. What do you know? And what do you know about a felony? When they said it's a felony, I said I didn't kill anybody. But it's a felony. And what you don't realize as a felon is you cannot enlist in

the army. You can get drafted, but you can't enlist. Well, I didn't know that.

So, in any case, I wound up having to -- I went to enlist and they said, oh, great we love to have people enlist, nobody's enlisting. And I wanted to go in the Corps of Engineers. And they said, well, you have to go take this test. And I took this test. And they said, oh, yeah, no problem; you passed with flying colors. And then the recruiter called me a couple of days later and said we have a little problem. I said what's the problem? He said you never told me you were a convicted felon. I said what does that mean? They said, well, you've got this felony conviction. I said what are you talking about? They said, well, is this you? I said yeah. They said it's a reckless driving. I said, yeah, is that a felony? They said yeah. I said, gee, I didn't realize that. He said, well, you can't enlist with that. I said, well, what am I going to do? He said, well, if you really want to enlist, we'll figure out something so you don't get drafted the day -- we'll swear you into the National Guard. That'll give us another month. And that'll give you a month to do what you have to do to change that.

Well, I went and I met with the chief of police and I pleaded my case. I went in as professionally as I could. And I told him what a screw-up I was as a young kid, how I had no idea it was going to affect me going into the military, how I had gotten drafted, I'm going in the military and I want to make something of myself and I want to be able to go into the Corps of Engineers, but to do that I can't be a felon and I have this reckless driving ticket on my record. And I guess I must have appealed to him in the right way because he said, well, let me see what I can do. And he called up Harrisburg where the records were for the state. And he said I'm checking on something and I think we made a mistake. We reported a reckless driving. And this young man is with me now and he's enlisting in the army, but it's a felony. And it wasn't meant to be a reckless

driving. It was meant to be careless driving. So I'd like you to change that record if you could as quickly as possible because it's affecting his ability to join the army. And they took care of it.

So from that day forth, I had a great respect for the chief of police. So I was able to get into the Corps of Engineers.

### What kind of car were you driving when that happened?

I had a 1965 GTO.

So these pictures of those racecars --

That's actually me racing those racecars.

## Wow. This is exceptional. This is amazing. So you went into the military.

I went into the military. I went into the Corps of Engineers. I went all through basic.

### So regular basic training.

Oh, yeah. Everybody in the army is trained in basic infantry training. So you go through basic infantry training.

Where did you go for your training?

Fort Dix, New Jersey.

### Still in the north.

I'm still in the north, Fort Dix, New Jersey. Well, I was squad leader. I did real well.

### Because you were an athlete.

I was an athlete. I've always looked at it this way. They try to break you down right off the bat. And there's a lot of screaming and a lot of yelling and a lot of physical whatever. And I would look at everybody and I'd say, well, you know what? I'm not the best guy or the strongest guy, but I'm not the weakest guy. I'm somewhere in here. So don't worry about it. Help the week guys get through and everything was okay. So they made me a squad leader. So that was fine.

When I got out of basic training, I was then sent to Fort Belvoir, Virginia. They trained me as a cartographic draftsman.

### Now, how did they know what your skills were?

Well, you take a test. And then they say, well, we'll let you in. And once you're in, wherever the slots are. So I wanted to get into construction, but the slots were filled up at the time. So I wound up having to get into mapping. You're basically trained to plot battles and to do in some cases recon with artillery spotting and all the stuff that involves mapping and path finding and all that sort of stuff, which is kind of interesting in its own right, but not necessarily what I wanted to do.

And then I was stationed at Fort Belvoir when I got out of school with a mapping unit. And it was rather interesting because we were mapping the moon from moon photographs. I was part of the army mapping process. And it was rather interesting because we had a very large warehouse. And we had satellite photographs of the moon that we were overlaying. It was probably 60-foot-diameter photographs of the moon, one large, all made of series. And they had scaffolding rigged up on top of it and they were re-photographing. It was very interesting. I mean I didn't quite know all of what was going on, but that was part of what we did there.

And then I got orders for Vietnam. And when I got to Vietnam, I really didn't have a spot. They didn't really know what to do with me.

## Because you are in the Corps of Engineers in Vietnam?

Yeah. But once you're in the army, they kind of can put you anywhere and do whatever they want with you. So I was in the Army of Corps of Engineers. And I was assigned to the 35th Engineering Group, which was in Cam Ranh Bay, which is a very beautiful place. I mean other than being in Vietnam. It had the whitest sand in the world, the bluest water in the world. You're waiting while they're deciding where they're going to send you in Vietnam. So you're there for a few days. And the beach is beautiful and the water is hot. You had to wear your boots down to the beach because the sand was hot and you couldn't walk on it because it was so hot. But it's not bad. And then at night you would sit out by one of the clubs and have a couple of beers and you'd watch the rockets going overhead and seeing which was getting closer. You knew you were in Vietnam. And Cam Ranh Bay had the ammo piers. So they would lob rockets from across the bay and try to hit one of the ammo piers. And you had to sit there and watch it. It would be like fireworks going off. You knew where you were at and you knew that you just got there and you don't know anything.

And then after a few days there about the time you kind of get settled in there and feel comfortable, then they move you on. And I knew I was in trouble when I got orders to a place that no one ever heard of. It was a place called Bảo Lôc. It was in the middle of the Central Highlands. And I knew that was way out there. So the day I am supposed to show up, you get all your stuff together and they put you on a truck with another guy. They put us on this small, small airplane with a lot of cargo on it. And it had cargo nets. It was called a Caribou, which I think was a twin prop made for short landings and short takeoffs.

So you kind of know you're going someplace remote. And we were given flak jackets and helmets. We weren't given weapons yet. We had our stuff with us. You get on this plane. The crew chief is halfway between the cockpit and the two pilots and us. So me and this other guy sit down and introduce ourselves and away we go. And we're sitting amongst boxes with cargo and some stuff. And we're looking out the window. And the plane is just (making noises) and you're sitting there and it's shaking and bobbing. You climb quickly and you're looking down on the jungles of Vietnam. You don't see cities. You don't see roads. You see pockmarks where there's been bombs. And you're there. It's a pretty somber time. In fact, the time flying over to Vietnam was. In itself you're in an airplane, commercial airliner. As you get -- 16-hour trip. Guam is a stop-off point and Japan. And then you're on the last leg and nobody's talking. And on the way in, the pilot comes on the air and says, We are now in a combat zone. Should we experience any fire during our landing, exit the plane immediately as soon as it stops and make your way to the nearest revetment along the runway. And it was like, Okay, we know where you're at.

Anyway, this plane flying to Bảo Lôc, that plane dove so steep so quick and it hit this metal runway. And the crew chief came back and said, fellows, when we hit the runway, I'm dropping the tailgate. Help me throw the stuff out. And when the plane turns around -- we don't stop -- there will be people there throwing stuff on and we take off. You get out, help throw on anything that needs to go on. So at the end of the runway the plane sort of skids to a stop, spins around. We jump off. We throw a couple of boxes on. There's a couple of guys throwing stuff on. They pick up what came off. They take off.

And sitting off to the side of the runway about 150 yards away are two guys on a jeep. And the jeep had a 60-caliber machinegun like that, like an old army jeep. And we walked over to the jeep. And these guys are picking us up. And they throw us a weapon. And one guy is riding shotgun on the 60 and the other guy is driving. And we sit down in the jeep and away we go. We drive through this little village and wind up at this base camp in Båo Lôc. It had a bermed revetment all the way around it. And it had guard towers and bunkers. And we had some little wooden buildings and some tents.

I was there for about a week, maybe two. I didn't have a bunk. There was no place for me to sleep. I hot bunked for a couple of nights. That was when somebody went on guard duty, you got to use their bunk. And when they came back, you got to go to the next guy's bunk. And then, finally, I worked a deal out with the medics. I got a stretcher and two ammo boxes and I slept in a stretcher for about two weeks. And when you wanted to roll over, you had to get out of the stretcher and roll over and get back down. That was Bảo Lôc. We had two helicopter gunships that were stationed there. So they would be taking off all night long and coming back.

I know my first day there I was assigned to the TOC, the Tactical Operations Center. This

was a battalion, the 35th Engineer Battalion. And the operation center was an underground bunker. And I remember going down there. I didn't really have a job. And everybody sort of introduced themselves. And I remember the very first day one of our bridge work sites got hit and a convoy was going on. And all this mayhem with getting MEDEVAC in and sending gun trucks out. I mean it was the biggest chaos, which is what all that stuff is. You're trying to do a job and you're doing like a construction job and then all of a sudden trouble hits and that takes the highest priority. So that was going on. And I'm thinking, well, here I am, wow.

And I hadn't really been assigned a job yet. I was the new guy and I was in-country as they say for maybe two weeks. And all the sudden I get assigned to what's know as a battalion forward. The work of the road that we were building and the bridges we were building were pretty well done or winding down in this general operational area and it was time to move on to a new area. And, eventually, they would move the whole battalion. But in the meantime, they take what they call a battalion forward, which is a handful of people that go and recon the new area, stake out and plan and lay it out. So we went to the new battalion area, probably 35, 40, 50 people. And I was the new guy. So I didn't have anything else to do. So I became the assistant operations sergeant at this new battalion area.

### You were sergeant already?

No. But I was his assistant. But that was what I wound up doing because I had this architectural experience and planning experience - - so I helped lay out the whole perimeter of the new [battalion area]. So we started out with a little group --we took a bulldozer and I think a mortar team, 50 guys and some supplies. And we cleared off a hilltop with the dozer. And we strung barbwire, concertina wire for the night and then expanded. And every day we'd get a few more Conexes and a few more people and we expanded and expanded. And over the course of about a month or two the entire battalion moved. Well, when the entire battalion moved, I knew everything. So they said you need to be in the operations and you'll be assistant operations officer. And the major that I worked with who was sent there, he oversaw all this and I was his assistant. So when the whole battalion moved, he just said you're going to be the operations sergeant. You'll be my operations sergeant. So I was the operations sergeant at 19 years old for an entire battalion. And I worked -- I probably worked close to 16 hours a day.



Vietnam War – Operations Sergeant



Bill's Sketch of Dillard Tower

### By you're accustomed to that.

Yeah. And I would be the first guy at work in the morning and the last guy at work at night. And we worked in an underground bunker. It was a tactical operations center. We had all sandbags, our communication center there, colonel's office, operations, which I was, and our first aid station was in there. That was underground.

### So how big is this underground place?

Not very large. Maybe 40 feet by 40 feet. It had about four feet, five feet of dirt on top of it and then two buildings on top of the dirt on top of it and sandbags, thick sandbag walls. Any of the entrances had big sandbag revetments in front of it.

And we were the hub of everything. But it was pretty interesting. And then we would go out and check on the work on the road and different things during the day. But it was very hectic. There was always something going on.

We didn't get attacked that much. We didn't get hit that much. We lost a few people to ambushes much like what's going on now in Afghanistan. You've got to run convoys to get supplies, to get personnel, to get mail. And your convoys are always subject to being hit. Your work party is working away. Whenever we had people working on bulldozers or heavy equipment, they always had to have a shotgun rider because you can't hear. You're on heavy equipment. You can be getting shot at all day long and you don't hear it until you start bleeding. So you had to always have a shotgun that would be covering your back. It wasn't bad, but the minute you'd get relaxed something would happen. You would get hit or there'd be an attack. So you were always on edge. It could have been a lot worse. It could have been a lot worse. But it was bad enough. It was bad enough. And it gave me a great appreciation for cooks because we lost more cooks than anything else.

#### Why?

Because you eat three meals a day and you have to have rations coming in. And the cooks bring the rations in. And the morale is much better if you can feed people hot meals at a work party on the road. So cooks are always out taking hot food. So the cooks are exposed as much as anybody else. So we lost several cooks in ambushes. So it was pretty hectic, pretty hectic.

Let's leave Vietnam.

Okay. That was the base camp. So that went on for a year. And then when I got out of there, I was stationed in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. I got stationed with the 82nd Airborne for my last six months. I was in the military for two years and eight months.

### I'm from North Carolina.

So you know Fort Bragg. So I lived through all of that. And, yes, it was the best experience of my life, worst experience and best experience. And it gave me a real appreciation.

### Because you knew you could do anything after that.

Oh, yeah. Yeah. You make those little promises with God. If I live through this, if I can just get through this, I will never ever again worry about balancing a checkbook or paying a bill. And it really gives you -- I think the military for me -- and I probably extend that to most people, you form a bond with people that you don't even know. But you will put your life on the line for them and you know they will do that for you. And when you experience that it's difficult to explain to people who haven't been in that situation. I'm sure for people that have been in disasters that have helped or did what they did at some point, your instincts take over. And until you get into a point where instincts take over, it's hard to describe to somebody that hasn't had that happen. But once that does it gives you a different appreciation of life that you'll never lose forever. And I'm fortunate that I have that appreciation. And that's why I enjoy racecars and all this other fun stuff.

So back to architecture. That was probably one of the major influences in my professional career dealing with people, all walks of life and getting things done and working with what resources you have. I mean we talk about building with indigenous materials. Well, you build with indigenous materials and you do what you have to do and you make do with what you have. So I think that carries over into my architectural profession as well.

#### So after Fort Bragg did you go back to Pennsylvania?

I did. I went back. Getting out of the army and being from Pennsylvania and being a veteran, Pennsylvania had a policy that you're a veteran, so they have to let you into school, which is a great policy, regardless of what your grades are. Unfortunately when they say they have to let you into school, they do. But then they decide based on your academic background where you can go into. So for me I never had a foreign language in school. So I didn't have a foreign language, which was a prerequisite to an architectural program. And they said but we'll let you in. Come into the architectural engineering program where you do not need a foreign language. And after a year if you do well, you'll be able to transfer. Well, you're looking at somebody that was a D and C student in high school. There's no way I'm going to make it in architectural engineering with all the math and all of that. So I never did. That's when I started working construction. Oh, no. That's after the army. I worked for Hugh Moore before the army.

So after the army I went back home. I started working for a firm. I worked for a small architectural engineering firm -- one architect, one engineer and myself. I was the only employee other than a receptionist. And they were just getting started. The architect didn't really like the engineer. So the other two architects that I talked about that the four of us became partners, that's when we were talking about how do we start our own business. And that's when we did start our own business. And it was shortly after I got out of the army. I think we started that in probably -- there might have been another firm I worked for for a short period of time. But that was probably in '74. We did a lot of things. We bought a building and renovated it for an office. We just had a lot of fun building things and designing things. We didn't make any money. But I mean we survived. My wife was a nurse. So that was good.

### So how did you meet your wife?

I met my wife in high school.

And she waited for you through Vietnam and all of that.

Yep. Yep.

## That's wonderful. And she was a nurse. So she always had a constant income.

Yes. Yes. So that helped. Our working relationship with The Architectural Studio was a lot of fun. But my partners were more into it's great being our own bosses; we don't have to be to work at this time or that time. And I wanted to work hard and get ahead. And they were like, well, this is great. If we want to go do this in the middle of the afternoon; we don't have to -- and it was --

### They didn't understand your work ethic.

But they were licensed architects and I wasn't, which is fine.

Then how did I get to Las Vegas? Well, growing up in Easton I grew up with Larry Holmes and his brothers.

The boxer?





The boxer. And Larry came out to fight for the heavyweight championship in 1978. And how many times can you say you know somebody that's fighting for the heavyweight championship? And I played football against Larry. I wrestled with Larry's brothers. I knew Larry. So my brother and I -- and I think we almost had a whole chartered airplane of friends that were in the same category that knew Larry and grew up with Larry. And we came out here to cheer him on. And when Larry won half of the guys I came out with climbed in the ring, carried Larry out of the ring and threw him and jumped into Caesars Palace swimming pool with him. And we all went to the victory party after the fight. And that's how I got out here.

But for the short three or four days that I was out here, I just saw all these cranes sticking out of all the construction sites -- and this was in 1978. The first tower was just built of the Flamingo Hilton. It was right across the street from Caesars where we stayed. All you could see was construction on that scale. And all I could think about was banging nails and doing this stuff, building these little houses back east. And I just thought, this would be a great thing to experience.

So I went home with that in the back of my head. And I mentioned that to my wife and she thought I was crazy. And I mentioned that to my partners and they thought I was crazy. But after maybe a month I brought my wife back out here to see if she'd be willing to do it. Well, we came out here one month later and we actually rented an apartment and got driver's licenses and went home and put our house for sale and decided to move out here.

### How did you change her mind that rapidly?

She said she'd do anything for one year if I wanted to experience it. So for one year -- here we are 30 years later.

### What is your wife's name?

Joy. So we did that. So we moved out here. We drove across the country. My wife was pregnant with our second son. And my first son was five years old and hadn't started school yet.

### This is perfect timing.

Good timing. We drove across the country. We pulled a little U-Haul trailer with everything we could get into it. And the rest of the stuff we gave away. I brought my construction tools and I brought my architectural tools and books. And I thought one way or the other I will find a job. Within one week my wife got a job at -- I think she started out at Desert Springs Hospital. And I had

an interview with George Tate. And I interviewed with George Tate. And I liked George Tate. And he said that he had some school projects that he would find out about in about a week. He would know whether or not he was going to get them or not. If he got them he certainly would want to hire me. So I didn't look anywhere else. I came home and I just said I'm not going to work anywhere else. I think George Tate is the guy. I like him. We hit it off real well. He called me back like three days later and he said, well, you know what? I'm not sure if they're coming or not. But why don't you come to work and why don't you start on Monday? And so I did. So I started working for George Tate. And this is it.

# First tell me the structure of an architecture firm. I've worked with a CPA firm. So I know that there are principals and partners and managers. What is the structure of an architecture firm?

They're different for different firms. But I think George Tate was a sole proprietor. We were at the time maybe five people, six people. I was sort of a project manager. There were a couple of draftsmen that worked with me. I kind of managed the project. George was in charge, did the design work and oversaw all of my work. And that was primarily it. As the firm gets larger, you'll have more project managers. As you get more project managers, one owner or principal or maybe more than one will oversee several of the project managers. The architect in the conjunction with the project manager on any given project will then interact directly with the client and with all of the engineers that are involved on a project. So that's primarily the makeup. Now, it gets a little different when you have different disciplines within a firm. But for the typical architectural firm, which we were and are ... At some point you think about as you get larger you should have more partners. So as we grew we brought -- as George Tate and I grew -- I think it was 1982 that I actually became a partner with George Tate. At that time I think George Tate was looking to retire. So in '82, we formed the Tate-Snyder partnership. And then I think George retired fully in about -- not too long after that, I think maybe '83 or '84. And I ran the firm as a sole proprietor until probably -- Windom I think has been with me for I think 12 years. He's now the principal and has taken over the business. But I believe Windom's been here for 12 years, maybe 14 years. And he became a small partner after two or three, maybe four years. So from that time frame I was a sole proprietor. And then I brought Windom in.




Windom Kimsey

#### So who designed this building?

We did ourselves. This is a combination of probably Windom, myself and a team. When it's your project, everyone wants to participate..

### So how large is it?

It's about 12,000 square feet. And when we built it we weren't sure whether we would be occupying the downstairs and renting out the second floor or vice versa. But then we did put an edition on about ten years ago because we just outgrew it right off the bat.

## That's great. Beautiful building.

And at one time we had so much work we had to actually put a night shift on because -- we had 85 people at one time -- we couldn't get everybody in the building. So we had a night shift, which didn't work very well. But we had that for a while.

# Wow. Now, why do you refer to this as a studio?

I don't know if we actually refer to it so much as a studio. In the Architectural Studio we did. But I think artists and architects sometimes use -- they like studio rather than the office. It's got sort of an art flare to it, a little more theatrics.

# Yes. Right. So you won design awards for this building. Tell me about those.

Yes. We've won a number of design awards for the building. Most recently -- this building is -- as much as people are now touting the LEED certification on everything, this is the very first LEED certified building in the state of Nevada. And we went back and got it certified as an existing building. We made some minor renovations to it. But all the basic principles of this building were designed in it. Well, we've been in this building for 12 years, 13 years. And we've made no major changes to get our LEED certification.

# Tell me what a LEED certification is.

Well, LEED is -- it's a certification that -- there's different classifications -- platinum, gold, silver. And it has to do with the degree of sustainability that you design into a building. For example, we primarily light that area -- let me tell them the turn the lights off and you'll see. We have lights everywhere obviously because we work at night. But we daylight that whole area. So let me ask them to turn the lights off so you can see.

There's the lights off. And we get reflection off of those light shelves. So we face southwest.

So what we did was a series of vertical and horizontal..., like a grid system so that we block out the sun from not only overhead, but when it sets from the west the horizontal fins block the sun from the angle of the sky. And the vertical fins block the sun as it's setting in the west. So principles like that are used in buildings.

But what you're primarily trying to do with the LEED certification is to design a building that is sensitive to the environment -- that's probably the simplest way to put it -- with the materials that you're using, with the energy that you use to light your building or to heat your building or to cool your buildings. So it's a combination of those in conjunction with some other aspects. But that's probably the simplest way to explain it.

# Thank you. What are the challenges over the years of operating three locations? Don't you have a location in Reno, one here and one --

We have one in L.A., actually Marina del Rey.

Our Reno location, again we've got some very good people in Reno, as we have very good people here. Being in Reno is only a one-hour flight away it's really not a big deal. I mean probably we can be in Reno as quickly as someone in Summerlin can drive to work in the morning. So that's really not a problem. And especially today with the way we can communicate with drawings back and forth on the computer, you don't have to wait for the mail to show somebody something. They can access our screens and we can access their screens.

# So are there a lot of business buildings in Reno right now going up?

Right now I think the business of buildings going up anywhere has sort of slowed down. But, no, we are doing some school district work in Washoe County. We have done so many schools all over the state. We've done a lot of schools in Clark County. We've done schools in Lyon County. We've done schools in New Mexico.

Personally my passion is -- and maybe it's my unorthodox education if you will. I once made the mistake of working with an educational consultant and referring -- he once asked me where did I go to school. And I made the mistake of referring to not having an education. And he said no, no, no. You didn't go to college, but you have a hell of an education. And I said you're right. I don't have a formal college degree, but I have an education that I think is very unique. But in my particular circumstances if I would have gone to college because I was a Vietnam veteran and the state [of Pennsylvania] said we have to let you go to college, I wouldn't be successful today because to be successful -- I look at these students or young professionals that come into this business, -- there's a big transition between what you've learned in school and what you've learned in a book and how you have to use that information and digest that and transmit that to a client or to the workplace. And some people never get beyond that and they don't understand that. And I think one of the biggest problems with the profession, any profession, whether you're a doctor or a lawyer or an architect, is by the time you become a licensed architect or a licensed engineer or a licensed whatever professional you are, many people think they've spent so much time in their education that they're automatically not only an architect but a businessman. And they're not the same. And you have so many people that have spent so much time in a profession or architecture like we're talking about that just assume because they spent so much time they should become a partner. And they have never learned the communicating skills that one needs to be able to talk to a client or instill confidence in a client. And that has nothing to do with architecture or engineering.

When you go to your dry cleaner or when you go to your restaurant or when you go to buy a car, you go to people that you like to deal with. Why? Well, that's different for everyone. But there's a certain amount of personality that one has to project. And if you're buying a car, you don't expect the person you're buying a car from to know absolutely every detail inside and out of that car before you buy it from them. But if he treats you right and he helps you answer the questions you want answered and he's helpful, he's your guy as opposed to somebody who can rattle off all the nomenclature of the engineering of the engine and this and that and does it have pause and transaction and is it this and that. That's not who you're going to buy the car from. And I think that transition of what makes a businessperson and what makes a person successful in any business is your skill in communicating what it is that you learned. And that's something that a lot of people don't realize. And that's why people go further in marketing quicker. I mean sales in any business. How do you rise to the top of a business? Well, it's hard to say that I'm better than you if you sold four times the amount of whatever we're selling this week and you do that every single week. You are going to be above me at some point.

I think you would have succeeded anyway with your work ethic. Oh, thank you. **There are awards in architecture, the Nevada and the Western Mountain Region Architectural Firm Award. What are those like and are they important for a firm?** I think they are. There are certain criteria that they look at in any of the awards. It's a reflection on your firm and it's in various categories. It's not just the design work of your firm. It's not just the finished product of your firm. It's how your firm is structured. It's how your firm treats its employees. It's what does your firm do to mentor its employees. So it's an encompassing category. And I think it means a lot because it means that you care about the people that are part of your firm. And that's always a hard line. It's a balance because you've got to be able to offer people some training and some education and some help to get ahead. But, on the other hand, in a business you can't be the person that gets all that information and all that help sucked out of somebody so now they can go get a job someplace else because they're a more -- you know what I mean? And that's always a fine line.

So if I look back -- and I'd like to do this at one time and just take out a two-page newspaper ad and list every single person that's ever worked for my firm and every single person that I've ever worked with and every client and every client's person that I've ever worked with and just say thank you for being part of my wonderful career whether I was able to teach you something that you took along or whether you taught me something that I was happy to see. That I think is the people aspect of business.

I was going to tell you a story of mentoring. And it ties in with my Mr. Fox and my artwork as an architect. And I have a love for kids in school and knowing where I came from in school. And I think that's why I like to go into school as a mentor because you're invited into a classroom with kids. You have no prejudgment on anybody. So every kid there when you walk into that classroom is the smartest kid in the class, the best student, the best this, the best that, the best whatever. There are no duds. There are no kids you wish weren't there. And you can appeal to them in a different way than the teacher because she already knows who the troublemakers are and she already knows, now, be good today; I don't want you to act up.

And I go in there -- and this particular incident happened at Green Valley High School a couple of years ago. And I went in. It's career day and I'm there talking about architecture. So we're in a classroom. And it's pretty simple. The first row are straight A students and they're all very

attentive. And the second row are B students. They're attentive, but they need to take notes. And the third row are the C students and they're kind of taking notes, kind of paying attention, kind of looking to see what the other guy wrote down, but they're attentive. The next row is the D students. They could care less, but they're not disruptive. The last row is I'm not here; I don't care what you're doing; I don't want to be here. And the teacher is standing by the door.

And during the course of my presentation, I take props because what are you going to do while you talk about architecture? You do this and do this? This is a building. This is a model. This is what we do. And these are some renderings. And these are some of our projects. And this is some interesting, fun stuff. So it's always fun to do that kind of thing. And I like to get through to the kids that are like me.

So the teacher interrupts me three times to tell this kid, One more time, John, and you're out of here. And he's in the back of the room leaning on his arm. So I said John. And now the whole class is focused on me interacting with John. And the teacher is like, What does he have in mind? I said, John, "what do you want to do? If this doesn't interest you, what do you want to do?" And he says, "well, I don't want to be an architect. I don't like this." I said, "But what do you want to do? What do you like?" Now I've got his attention and he sort of mumbles, "art. I like art." "Come here." So I get him to the front of the class. And everybody's looking. And I said, "you like art?" I said, "what's wrong with that?" I said, "are you pursuing it?" He said, "no." I said, "why not?" And he said, "well, my mom doesn't want me to be an artist." I said, "okay. Why not?" And he said, "because artists don't make any money." I said, "would you do we a favor?" He said, "sure." I said, "here, show this rendering to the class."

So I had one of our framed renderings. And I said, "can anybody tell me how much I had to pay an artist to do this rendering for me?" I showed it to him and said is this what you'd like to be able to do? He said, "oh, this is what I'd like to do." So I get a couple of hands. Oh, \$300, \$500. I said "that was \$3,000." Now this kid John has got a death grip on this. Don't touch. Now he's my protector of this art -- now he's important because he's holding something worth \$3,000 and it's what he wants to do.

Now he is my main assistant. He is 100 percent focused on me and what we're doing. He is now engaged. The teacher is totally amazed that I could engage this kid for the first time. So we go

on with the rest of the presentation and everything. And then when we're all done he wants to help me carry everything to my car. So I said, "John, what's wrong with art?" I said, "that's how I got into architecture. I became an architect through my love of art. There's a big field of art out there. I said my son is going to college for art. Why don't you want to be an artist?" And he says, "well, my mom doesn't think you can make any money as an artist. So she wants me to do this." So I gave him my card and I said, "you give this to your mother and you have her give me a call."

So I got this call from this woman and she starts -- she didn't quite know what to say. She said, Mr. Snyder, my son brought your card home and said I was supposed to give you a call. She said I'm a single mom and all I want to do is help my kid be able to get a good job when he gets out of high school. And this is the first time that anything ever positive came home with my son from school. "What did you tell my son?" And I told her the story. And she said, "well, I had no idea that people could make that kind of money in art." And I said, "ma'am, I'm an architect and I'm a successful architect and I got here because I have a love of art and people encouraged me along the way. I said it doesn't matter if your son likes art. If your son wanted to be a mechanic, encourage him to be the best mechanic or the best artist. He'll be successful. It's difficult raising a kid. And I said but when they get bombarded with stuff that somebody thinks they should know and it's not what they like, they're always going to migrate to what they like. And if you'd given him some encouragement for art" -- and she said, "well, I really thank you because I just had no idea that you could make a living in art and I thank you so much." I said, "well, please encourage him."

So that was probably the neatest thing that ever happened to me in terms of mentoring kids, to take this kid that was about to get thrown out of the class and he's now my main assistant and his mother calls me the next day. So that was pretty moving. That was kind of fun. **I love it.** 

When we look at buildings now sometimes we can look at this diner and say that was designed in the 50s. What are people going to say about the buildings that are being designed now? Are we in some kind of an era? What can we say about what's happening now? Well, I think as we mentioned people are becoming more aware of our environment. So you're seeing more buildings that are going to be sensitive to energy usage. You're seeing buildings that are far more sensitive now to the security issues that we're dealing with in the world. Anybody who goes through an airport, it's a hassle. And I think you're going to start to see some new forms of technology in the future that are going to avoid that hassle. But I think between the security and the environmental issues, buildings are changing with those two aspects. We are a reactionary society. And until there's some major catastrophe...

I was watching a program the other day. We had the opportunity on a couple of our projects to work with Leslie Robertson's firm, LERA. Leslie Robertson is the engineer that designed the World Trade Center. We've worked closely with him over the years. Obviously, 9/11 and the World Trade Center is something that's touched us all in different ways. It's really touched Leslie Robertson in a major way because he felt that if he could have done anything to make that building last a little longer -- I just saw a program -- maybe it was on the Discovery Channel -- of a new high-rise building -- I'm not sure if it was -- I think it was in Asia that Leslie Roberts was doing. And they were going through the building and they were describing what added security issues that they were doing. This is going to be one of the tallest buildings in the world.

And what they've done is they've designed every 12th floor of the building with an open area, just an opening. It's an open floor that has the elevator cores and the stair cores penetrating it, but there's nothing in it. And it's designed with overdesigned trusses so that if anything happened to the 12 floors above it, it would support those 12 floors regardless of what happened. And it's wide open. So any fires or anything would be stopped there. And any collapses would be supported 12 stories below. So that's one innovation.

The other innovation is they've taken the fire stairs, which no one ever uses in a building until there's a catastrophe, and they've built them out of basically concrete, impregnable towers. But they've pulled them to the perimeter of the building so that people will go to the corners of the building and be able to go up and down. And they can be accessed because they're on the corners. What happened in the World Trade Center is the stair towers were in the core. So all of the confusion and all of the destruction and all of the fire, they had to go through all of that when those weren't collapsed on them. And then you have people trying to get into them.

So these are all lessons learned. Everything that we have in a building code is a lesson learned from a tragedy. Every innovation in a building is a lesson of a tragedy. Panic hardware that you push when you go out of a door, that's all come from some of the great tragedies we've had



TSK Studio

where people are trapped. There was a famous fire -- infamous fire in one of the sweatshops in New York when the women were all working and they didn't want people to get in and out. So they locked doors shut and doors opened in. And what would happen in a panic situation is everybody goes for the door at the same time. Well, if the door has to open in and you have people backed up behind you, you can't get the door open. Panic hardware is just that. The panic of people falling into the door automatically opens the door and away you go. So that was an innovation of a catastrophe. And I think most of our codes are basic reaction to catastrophes.

I had the opportunity at the end of the MGM fire to be the liaison between the local chapter of the AIA and the governor's Blue Ribbon Fire Panel that reviewed the tragedy of the MGM fire. So I sat through all of those meetings with the fire marshal. And that was very interesting. And in our hotel designs that led to sealing off the hotel corridors so that in a fire that smoke and gases travel through any opening in the building, all the way through the building. Well, an elevator core is a shaft all the way through the building. And elevator doors and elevator cores are not smoke-proof, which means that any of that smoke and fire and fumes and all that toxic stuff will travel. Well, as a result of the MGM fire, we now have elevator corridors. You may not notice them because a lot of those corridor doors are on hold-open devices that don't close to seal the elevators off until a fire situation. But that's a result of the MGM fire as well as sprinklers throughout every hotel building now, which was not a requirement prior to the fire.

But different things like that are always reactive. And as society reaches new dilemmas and new challenges, architects respond to them in various ways. And when those ways wind up being a new innovation that make sense, they wind up being adopted into code.

# That factory was the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory.

Exactly. And then just recently another incident was the -- it's probably five years ago -- the nightclub in -- where was that at, in Connecticut? [Station Nightclub in Rhode Island] **That's right.** 

And the same thing happened. People trying to control crowds and doors being locked and people using pyrotechnics that weren't [properly prepared to do so].

## So architecture has a real place.

It does. It does. I think I do though like -- I think architects that do public buildings have a unique

role because we interact with a lot of bureaucracies. But it's not the bureaucracy that is our client. Technically they are. But the user is our client. And you've got to weed through the bureaucratic BS to get to what's the real need of the client. And that's unique because every bureaucrat thinks he knows what that's supposed to be. And usually they don't or they wouldn't be a bureaucrat. They'd be doing what you're doing. And that's difficult. So sometimes you have to tell people the idea you want them to tell you before you tell them they had a great idea.

# Of all the designs that you've won, all the design awards, 65 of them I believe, something like that --

Probably. But they're all firm awards. And I think one of the things which I like to be is maybe the catalyst that allows the whole firm to take credit for an award because you could have the best award-winning firm in the world but if your receptionist isn't nice to the client when he or she calls in the first place, you're not going to get the opportunity to earn the award. And I think sometimes in architecture designers are given a lot of awards. But the designer is only a very small portion of that whole project. And the real success of a project is in the end how do users view that project and how does your project keep that user safe and how does your project make their experience, when they go into that building, a pleasant experience whether that's your home, your office, or your workplace.

I mean you'll hear people talking about going to work and they love to be there. I've always told everybody when it comes to work and it comes to your profession you spend a third or more of your life at work. So you should go to a place that you like to work at. You should work with people you like to work with. I mean if you could do that, your life would be so much easier. And it's the kind of philosophy that I've always liked to have. I mean we like to do company picnics on Fridays. It forms camaraderie. I think it's fun to do. I kind of like to think of it's just not about, -- I mean you have to make money to stay in business, but I think you have to realize that we're here for people. And some of those people work for us and some of those people are people that are going to use our buildings. And I think architecture is an extension of creating environments that allow people to express themselves or use those buildings in a way that makes its a pleasant experience whether it's a shopping experience, whether it's a dining experience, whether it's a working experience.

One of the few factories that we did was a fun experience to work with. We created a plastics factory that was really kind of a fun and a pleasant place to be in. I remember our client, that

was sort of their philosophy as well that our people are inside here and can we get some natural light in here and can we brighten this place up? There's an assembly line approach that we have to follow to manufacture our product, but how do we make this a place where we can get people that want to come and work here and create? Even though they're working on a quasi assembly line, it's a fun place to work and it's a nice environment. I mean it's a factory, but it's a great environment.

And I think that environmental aspect of creating a space where people can work in a pleasant environment, it's basically a plus of any type of a business. If you think about any kind of a business whether it's a doctor's office -- I mean you go to the doctor's office and there's chairs and they're all lined up like you're sitting at the airport gate. And there's a little tiny TV over here and there's 17,000 magazines from last year. And there's somebody on a cell phone and there's two kids that are crying. What's wrong with this picture?

I think one of the favorite projects that we did that I think is a true reflection of what I like to think of public architecture is in Satellite D at the airport, the D gates. Have you been to the D gates? **Oh, yes. Yes.** 

The children's art walls. If anybody asked me I think that is probably one of the best projects. We held a competition and we did a similar competition when we did the Reno courts facility. We invited all of the fourth grade classes from at the time every one of the 16 elementary schools in Clark County. And we gave them the names of 16 cities that the airport wanted to highlight. And we said to 127 elementary schools' fourth grades we will accept designs in any media for any one of these cities. Draw us a picture of what you think the city looks like on an 8 1/2 by 11 piece of paper and submit it. And we selected 40 and we gave honorable mentions to 40.

And then we selected 16. We then took those 16 artists and gave them awards and said you are now the artists. And you are to work with your art class and your art teacher and our staff and you are now to take your 8 ½ by 11 piece of paper under your direction because you are the artist. And we will help you, but your art class is now to lay that out on a six-foot by nine-foot canvas and paint that. And it's going to take you two, three, four weeks. That's fine. And we provided the canvas and we provided the assistance. Then they submitted those canvases.

We then took those canvases, rolled them up and sent them to the tile company. And then they hand painted them on 486 six-by-six tiles that are 12 feet by 18 feet of tile and then installed



Berry Plastics



McCarran Art Wall



McCarran Art Wall



McCarran Art Wall Dedication Ceremony



them on the wall. So the next time you're over there, there's over 560 names of kids on the bottom of each one of those -- or collective. But on the bottom of each of those tiles is the name of the school, the name of the teacher, the name of the artist and then the name of every one of those kids in that art class.

#### Oh, I can't wait to go back.

And every once in a while I see somebody over there that's about 19 years old pointing to some flower that they did or something. It's really kind of fun. When we did that we had a dedication of those art walls before the airport opened and we invited all those kids and their families. And Senator Reid was there to make the dedication. And we had that area blocked off with screens. I have pictures of it somewhere.

I had 500 T-shirts printed. They were all orange and they had the pictures reduced on them. And then on the back of the shirt it had "architect's assistant." And we gave all those kids a shirt. Nobody was allowed back behind the wall unless you had an orange shirt on until we unveiled it. And when we unveiled it the family and the community was allowed back there. But all of those kids at each of their panels were there. And they just thought they were the most important people because, first of all, they had no idea that this painting they did, where it was going. And then when they saw it on that scale, they had absolutely no idea about it.

#### Oh, I can't wait to go back.

It was pretty interesting.

# Oh, that's great. That is so great. My last couple of questions. What does it mean to you to have a school named for you? [Snyder William Elementary School]

It's a very humbling experience. Having sat through the naming committee's sessions for other people and I see now how difficult that is -- and that was done unbeknownst to me. And what an honor. I mean what an honor and humbling. When I look at the names of certain schools that I remember that are named for policemen that were killed in the line of duty and you think of yourself -- I'm sorry. I'm getting choked up. It is a very, very humbling honor.

And I have a responsibility, my wife and I, to those kids to do so much down there. I was just down there yesterday. I'm a runner. I like to run. And I do a number of marathons a year. So we have a running club. And school starts now at eight o'clock or thereabouts. So we start early. So kids come to school early. Yesterday I had 35 kids meet me on the playground at 7:15. And we ran for half an hour. And I had 35 kids. Some walk, which is fine. Some run what they can and walk. When we were just getting started this little kindergarten girl was crying. I said what's the matter? And she said so-and-so -- I didn't know the name -- is being mean to me. I think it was her older sister. And I said, well, come on and run with me and we'll forget about it. But a kindergarten kid running. And, of course, she's running because her sister is running. And she'd want to keep holding my hand. "Can you hold my hand?" I said, "okay." So you just run a little and then you walk. And then what the kids do is they have a card. And every time they make a lap, they get a punch in the card. If they get a total of 26 miles --

#### Oh, my goodness, a marathon.

Yeah. But over the course while the running club is going on; I give them a medal. And then we have a pizza party. So I take them over here to my favorite little pizza restaurant in my favorite little shopping center over here, Enzo's, because the last time we did it I had 40-something kids. So I always have to prearrange with Enzo because we take the back room at Enzo's. And I have a sign, Snyder Superstars, which is the school logo and sign. And we go over. I can take the bus in the back of the parking lot so the kids don't have to walk through anything. It's where kind of employees park and a little bit of service. But there's no real traffic out there. And the bus will park back there and I'll rent a school bus and take all the kids over. But on the back I put the name, the Snyder Superstars. So the kids think it's my secret entrance into the pizza parlor. And then, of course, while they're there we have fun and eat all the pizza and soda you can drink and salads and whatever they want. And then Enzo shows them how he makes pizza. So Enzo feels real important, too. So the kids leave and they all know how a pizza is made and they all love Enzo's pizza. It's a lot of fun. And I enjoy doing that.

My wife has a book club that she does down there. Let me see if I can find it here. The kid made us a book. Oh, here it is. The kids published this book. They wanted a book to put in the library so people knew who I was. So they had a dedication a little while ago and they presented this book to my wife and I. And the kids all signed it. These are all the artists. They had some kind of a competition in the art class. And this is my life. The kids did this for me and my wife. They did the pictures and then they wrote the story. This is one of my first cars.

### Oh, that is wonderful.

And they did the pictures. It this is my midget football team. They wrote the stories. They did the picture and then they wrote the story. [We begin to turn through the book.]

Oh, how you met your wife. Oh, that's great.

That's my wife on November 14th.

#### She just had a birthday.

Yes, she did.

## I just had a birthday November 8th.

Oh, all right. This is great.

Then family. And then our wedding.

Ah, the lovebirds.

And then my army stuff. And then Joy working in the nursery.

Oh, that's wonderful.

Look at the babies.

#### So is Joy still working as a nurse?

No. She retired a few years ago.

And then our office building.

#### A little different, but okay.

And then some of our projects. This kid, he did a great job. And I spoke with him quite a bit and then he wrote this story. But he could hardly read the story. And I said you know what? You just keep drawing and you don't worry about how difficult it is to read because I have a hard time reading. And I could just see he was standing up there because the kids -- the teacher in the library -- when they present it they had all the kids and they would turn each page and then they read the story. The kids that did the picture then wrote the story. And he was reading like one word at a time and it was hard to pronounce the word and the teacher would fill it in for him. Then after a little while she sort of took over so he wasn't embarrassed. And I went to him later and I said I have a really hard time reading, too. I said you keep drawing because I can't read very well either, but, boy, I like to draw. So you keep going. And I thought these were great. And then he started telling me about how his dad just thought he was really drawing good. I said, well, you just keep it up. And I

think that's what's important.

When Joy and I go to the school, I think that's what I like to do. And I think we bring that little extra. So that's our responsibility at the school.

# I think that's wonderful. This is amazing. I love this.

Oh, these are some of the projects we did at school. This is when the city had their centennial. This is about an 80-foot long wall and it's about 12-foot high. And for two weeks we did this painting with the kids. And I had a couple of my people help me. But I was down there with Joy every day with the kids. I had my son and one of his friends. They were graffiti artists. And I had them -- see, it looks at Sunrise Mountain, which is like behind the airport like you're seeing in that picture there. I said I want you guys to paint the sky and the mountains as a background because that was real high. So just paint that out.

When they were done then we brought the kids out. And the kids to get picked to do this, they each had a drawing that they did, 8 1/2 by 11. So then we said, okay, let's put this in like a time line of Las Vegas because it was all about the theme of Las Vegas. So we started out with the desert and the Indians and the early days of western themed stuff and then into downtown Las Vegas.

#### You have the Moulin Rouge.

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

#### You know your history.

Well, the kids did it. The kids did the research. And then all the way up to New York New York and the roller coaster and all that. Elvis. And we got Muhammad Ali. And the kids did these. And this one girl did this great sign. You can't see the pink. But she did the Las Vegas sign with three showgirls across. We took them out and taped their drawing where we thought it went into a time line. Then we gave them a piece of chalk and we said, okay, now draw it bigger. And if it wasn't big enough, we took a sponge and erased the chalk and we said, no, make it bigger. And then when they got it where we thought it was okay, then we gave them a felt tip and said now draw it with felt tip. And each of these took a day or two. And then once they were there then we let them paint. And we had paint everywhere. We probably bought 20 gallons of paint. I mean the kids wanted to mix up a little color. Oh, boy. But it was fun. We had a lot of fun.

Oh, that is great.



Snyder School Art Wall

And this was the first year of the school. We did every person in the school. Teacher, kid, custodian, kitchen worker, everybody had to make a tile that we then fired and then glazed. So everybody that was there the first year of school has this tile up in the activity center on the wall. So that's probably the length of the activity center. And that was a fun project. So getting the kids to draw it on a tile and get it where they wanted and then getting them to paint it with the glazes and then fire them -- we had to send them out to have them fired. And then we installed them. So it was some fun projects like that.

#### This is amazing. Oh, I love it.

And then the kindergarten kids every year, they do a Chinese New Year celebration. We bought a mask in Chinatown in New York. So we have a mask. Then we made a dragon costume. You know this fabric like when you want to put stones down instead of grass and you don't want the weeds to grow through?

#### Oh, yes. Yes.

They put this black fabric down and it's about six-foot wide in rolls. I bought a roll of that. Then we cut the heads out. Then I had the kids come and help me paint it. We spray painted it and made it look like a dragon. So that's our costume. And then we have the dragonhead. Now we have five kindergarten classes. So we can't get them all under there. But we have probably a hundred kids in the dragon and then the rest are the noisemakers. And so for Chinese New Year all the kids in the whole school sit out and around and line the hall. And then all the kindergarten kids are the dragon and the noisemakers and me. And we just make all kinds of noise and bang and clang. And the kids, they love it because the kindergarten kids get to show off. The bigger kids get to see their little brother or sister. And we have fun. Then when the kids are done they get a Chinese dinner. So we have Chinese food brought in and they all get to eat Chinese food. It's just fun.

### I love it. I want to go to one of those celebrations. This is great.

All right. So that's Chinese New Year. That's one of the things we do.

I think that's Joy with her reading club. That's the running club. Oh, they're showing me in the New York Marathon [We are looking through the book that the students made for him].

One of the things I've done down there is all of my marathon medals I have in the display case down there. And right before I run a marathon I'll go down with the kids. And before the New

York Marathon, a couple weeks before I went down and I told the kids that they had to help me train for my last marathon training. So all the PE classes all day long would run corners with me. So one class would be here. The boys would be here and the girls would be here and another class and another class. And I would continue running, but they would run from point A to point B. And then I would pick them up point A to point B. But every kid in the class ran with me all day. So I ran -- I don't know -- probably 12, 15 miles. But the kids all ran probably a mile in each PE class. So they all feel like they helped me train for the marathon. So then I put all my marathon medals down there. So they have a tie-in with the New York Marathon.

#### Oh, that's wonderful.

That's my racecar. My wife won't let me race anymore. I'm too old she says. But when I was still racing, my racecar -- I forget which one I had -- that racecar up there, that's me in number 56. I was racing at the Las Vegas Speedway one weekend. So I had my pit crew bring my racecar to the school. So the kids got to climb in it and sit in it and hang out on it. So it was kind of fun. They like to do that.

#### But you actually raced it.

Yeah. Yeah. And that's Joy. She makes jewelry. So the kids always like to see her jewelry.

What is that? Oh, that's the firm. There's another bus trip to the firm. When I take the kids over to Enzo's, we stop here first. And I break them up into groups. Then I have five or six people that will show them something that we do here. So they all get a little feel of architecture.

## That is so wonderful.

So it's kind of fun.

#### Oh, yes. But you don't know what that does for them.

This is when I met Bill Clinton. [Pointing to a photograph]

#### Oh, that's great.

But this is the kind of stuff that just keeps going.

#### This is a wonderful book. It's like 50 pages.

I know. They're kids. And we have some friends. One of my son's friends from school, we just saw her a couple of weeks ago in New York. She lives in New York now. She is an actress and also a writer. And she wrote a children's book, which was her alter ego as she was growing up. And she



Bill running with kids at Snyder School



Bill's Race Car

wrote a book about it and it got published. So we bought a bunch of books and made arrangements that when she comes back home to Las Vegas for Christmas we're going to take her down to the school and she can meet the kids. And we bought a bunch of books to put in the library so she can be the visiting artist to talk about her book to the school. And the kids will actually meet the writer. And her book is in the library.

We go to a lot of benefits, auctions and other programs. We did a couple of things, which were kind of fun. One we did a couple of years ago. I forget now what the auction was. But you could buy a lunch or a dinner with Ms. Nevada. So I bought that. I thought that would be great. So I don't know what it cost. But anyway, I bought it. So I get to go to lunch with Ms. Nevada. So she says, "oh, where do you want to go to lunch?" And I said, "well, I want you to come down to my school for lunch. And I want you to have lunch at the school with the kids and talk to the kids about what it's like to be Ms. Nevada because we have a whole lot of girls and they just would think this is so great that they got to meet Ms. Nevada and could ask you questions." She said "really? Oh, that would be great." So anyway, I did that.

## I was going to wonder what Joy felt about that. Okay.

Well, another auction -- I forget what it was. And we need to do more of this. But one year you could purchase a dinner for four at a fire station with the firemen. And it was just one of those fun things. So I bought it. Then I called and I said, look, I want to make a little twist on this. How about I bring some kids from my school to the fire station near my school that routinely comes to check all the fire alarms at my school so we can form a little bond, a little partnership? And the chief said, yeah, I think that's a good idea. Let me make arrangements. So we called. So what I did was the principal picked about a dozen kids, maybe 16 kids, eight boys and eight girls. And we took them to the local fire station. And those big dumb firemen were falling all over the kids. It was so neat. And we had a barbeque there. They cooked hot dogs and hamburgers and they had potato salad and Cokes and chips. But the kids got to climb on all the equipment.

And the principal handpicked the kids that were all having some kind of problems. Oh, it was so great. They had one kid. I forget what his problem was. I think he had some emotional problems. I don't know if he was in the special ed part. But you should have seen the picture when we put him up on that engine and he had his hands with a death grip on the steering wheel. And they



Kids Tour of Fire Station

had a helmet on him. And he had a smile from ear to ear. It was the neatest picture.

We had pictures of all the girls hanging on the back of the fire truck like they're going to the fire. Then we suited the kids up so they could wear the gear and feel how heavy it was. And everybody wanted to be a firemen. So they all wanted to be firemen. So they all got to meet firemen. And then they thought it was neat that they all slept in the same bedroom. And they had this big shower with like five showers at that time. They didn't understand this concept yet; in high school where they take a gang shower. But it was fun.

But I liked to see -- if you look at people and you say, well, why did you become a fireman? My father was a fireman or the next-door neighbor was a fireman and one time he took me to the firehouse. If we could expose kids to these kinds of things while they're in the learning process to where a spark goes off in their mind --

Like when we did the McCaw School of Mines, while we were doing that the kids were having fun learning about mining. We were building this artificial mine. And we put all these books down there. Kids wanted to learn about mining. They didn't say, well, I have to learn about mining because it's part of Nevada history. They wanted to learn about mining. And we've even had -- I forget his name now. But we had one of our McCaw students who is currently going through the MacKay School of Mines at UNR. Why? Well, I went to McCaw School of Mines. I got interested in mines when I went to school. I'm going to become a mining engineer. I mean I think it's those kinds of exposures.

And I think one of the disservices that we do in education is somewhere along the line we have guidance counselors that take a look at your transcript to tell you what your aptitudes are. And then they say, well, this is what you should pick. I get through to a lot of kids in school when you go there for career day and they say, well, I'm not going to college; I'm not interested in college; I don't have any money to go to college. I say what do you want to do? I say, well, do you ever think of going in the military? Why? Because whatever you want to do when you join the military, whatever branch of the military it is, when you join you get to pick what you want to do. They don't say, oh, no, no, you don't have straight A's so you can't do that. By simply signing your name, they will train you for exactly what you want to do. And how can you not go for that?

And what better way to get a head start in life if you can't go to college because not



Kids on Fire Truck

everybody has the money to go to college and not everybody's going to get a scholarship because not everybody's a straight A student. So if you're not a straight A student or you don't have money -- and there's a whole group of people, well, what do I do to get started in life? I mean if you want to go to the police academy, the fire academy, any of these, that's fine. But you still have to have an aptitude to get in and there's still a lot of competition. Why not go into the military? You're going to get all kinds of things while you're learning. You're going to get paid. You're going to get to see parts of this country you never saw. You're going to meet all kinds of people. And it's kind of like going to college, but you're getting paid for it and you don't have to have wealthy parents to send you to college and you don't have to be a straight A student and you can learn as much as you want to learn.

And then when you're out, you can even get some assistance from the government to go to college. But better yet, you have four years that are not wasted as opposed to drifting from job to job to job and now you decide to go to college. It usually didn't work that way because after four years and after high school drifting from job to job to job, you wind up probably being married and now maybe some kids and now you can't even afford to go to college. Now you have a family to raise. So I think it's a really good opportunity that I don't think a lot of people take advantage of.

#### We don't. No.

And you can learn anything you want.

# And most people don't look at it that way. At least I haven't.

No, they don't. I met some very intelligent people who are in the military for different reasons. Some of them were there for the challenge. One particular sergeant I worked with had a son with some kind of a very rare disease. He said the army sends me anywhere in the country where that specialist is for whatever stage my son's disease is in and I get time off to go with him based on his medical schedule, not my job schedule. I couldn't do that with any other job anywhere. I would have to take off from work. And if it takes six months to be with my son, they don't expect you to leave your son sitting in a hospital in some different city without you being there with him. He said where could you do that anywhere else? I mean I never thought of it when I was in the military. But every once in a while you'd say, well, why are you here? You could do anything you want. Why are you still in the military? And you hear those kinds of stories. And there's something to that. Today a lot of people don't even have medical insurance. Think about that. A lot of people don't even have any medical insurance.

# Of course. That's one of the major problems.

And there you don't have to worry about anything. But that's something that I tell a lot of kids that they sort of feel like they're a dead end and they don't have any encouragement. They know their family doesn't have the money to help them go to college. And they know they're not a straight A student. So they're not going to get a scholarship to go to college. And so they, What am I going to do? They're going to try to get a job. Well, the military is a great way to learn any skill that you want to learn. Then when you get out of the military, there is nobody that says, well, how do I know that you had four years of something worthwhile? You learn how to deal with people and you learn how to take orders and you learn about life.

# My last question: Did Larry Holmes ever know what he started?

I don't know. I run into Larry every once in a while when I'm back home in Easton and we chat a bit. And when he was still fighting out here, I'd go to all of his fights.

# That's great. This is wonderful. I will never look at a building the same way. I won't. This is amazing.

I think one thing, though, to leave you with as far as a building is every building you do is a piece of your personality that you're giving away. And it takes a lot out of you. And every building has a lot of stories. Not all of them are good. But I think it takes a piece of you; the good, the bad and the ugly. It takes a piece of you. You put so much into it. And I'm sure is that actors and producers, when they put a movie together, it's the same thing. It sucks something out of them that they won't get back and they leave a piece of themselves in that building or in that part. I think maybe that goes without saying with all people that create anything whether it's a book because you can't take it back and you don't get to do it over again. You look at a movie as an actor and you say, Why did I ever do it that way? Or a writer, Why did it ever write that? Or an architect, Why did I ever -- of course, they always say with architecture you can always plant ivy to cover your mistakes.

# What is your favorite building that you've done or that you had a part in?

I would have to say I think the McCaw School of Mines where two teachers had an idea and they didn't know how to build it. They wanted to build a make-believe mine inside an empty classroom

out of papier-mâché. And they asked me if I could help them. And I said yes. And we designed the 5,000 square foot, million-and-a-half dollar artificial mine that's now had 50,000 students tour. And it didn't cost anybody anything. And we now have a foundation that raises approximately \$80,000 a year. And we take all the kids there, all the bus trips, all of the -- we furnish the buses. So the field trips for the kids that go, the only thing we ask is that the teachers that are taking the kids have to go to one of our educational -- I forget what we call them. And that's like a mandatory one-hour --

## Like a workshop.

Yeah, like a workshop. And then the classes are based on availability. And then we have a group of docents. They're a group of retired folks that live in the area that give the tours.

#### So where is it?

It's in Henderson. It's at the McCaw Elementary School. We built it on a little chunk of land. It was school district property, but there wasn't anything going on on it. It was right next to the school. In fact, that quilt there was made for me by the kids at the dedication. I had it framed and folded. But you can see where it's turned over. Every kid in the school signed the back of that quilt.

And when we did that project it was really kind of fun because I would go to school every two weeks for about probably a year and a half or two years while we were raising money and designing it and getting it going without actually doing -- well, I actually started construction. But I would go to the school and we'd have a breakfast with some community folks that were helping us try to raise money. And then after that I would go and I would give a little class with the kids talking about what we were building or how we were doing it. I did that for probably the four years that it took us to build it.

But when we did our research on it, I actually went underground in a mine for eight hours, an active gold mine in Oatman, Arizona, with one of my guys and two teachers, the two teachers who had the idea of doing this papier-mâché mine. So we went underground. We were a mile underground and a mile back in. We watched the modern day mining with the drilling and all of this. And then we also went back into the old mine where it was picked and shoveled and crawled all through of all of that with the bats and everything. We spent eight hours underground. It was pretty interesting. We had a mining engineer with us, a safety engineer. We had masks if we needed them. The only light was that which was on our helmet. It wasn't claustrophobic like you would



think. It was actually very pleasant. When you realize -- other than the stories of people that get trapped and flooding and those horror stories -- we know every little about mines. But as far as a work environment, there are two guys here and they're doing their job. And they're drilling and setting dynamite and drilling and setting dynamite. It's 55 degrees year-round. You don't have somebody looking over your shoulder. You don't have widgets going by a zillion miles an hour and you have to fix this or fix that. We did that. And that was the real research.

Then the other part of it was we went to Disneyland to the Indiana Jones ride. And we just rode that over and over and over and we looked at all the details of how they did all this stuff. Then we found out that the company that did the Indiana Jones ride, the artificial stonework, also did the volcano at the Mirage. So I conned them into doing our mine. I took our model that we built and I put it in their lobby and I called them every day and every week and finally got an appointment with the owner of the company. And I told him what we were trying to do. I told him the research we did. And he said I'll make you a deal. He said you pay my lead guy. You just pay his salary, but just his salary. I'll furnish him and I'll give you all the materials, all the equipment. And to help him why don't you go to work with the carpenters apprenticeship program because those are the people that want to learn how to make these artificial stone things? We'll work a deal with the carpenters union and they'll send us apprentices. So instead of them building fake stuff behind the apprenticeship program building, we'll send them out to a job where it's of some value. Our lead guy is the best. He'll train these guys. They'll be happy to be learning from the expert. And when you're all done, you'll have what you want.

That's what we did. And we did the same thing with the electricians union. And George Marnell from Marnell Masonry -- we were building all these high schools and they were all out of masonry at the time. And so I got good at twisting arms. I had a fellow named Jim Ledbetter, who was one of the block companies. And I said, "Jim, I need some blocks. I need 6,000 blocks to build this thing." Oh, I'm looking, I'm looking. So I said, "listen, what do these guys do with all the broken up blocks when they're done building? Do those blocks get all smashed up? Do they come back? What do they do?" He said, "no, well, they just get put on pallets and stored somewhere. They never match. But somebody eventually wants to build something and they stucco it. It doesn't matter." I said, "well, you know what? We're going to stucco all this. I don't even care what color

they are." He said, "well, why didn't you say so?" So we got 6,000 blocks one day delivered to the job. That's when it started. I got the blocks.

George Marnell from Marnell Masonry was doing a lot of our schools and I twisted his arm. And I said, "George, can you help us out?" And he said, "I'll tell you what. You pay my guys their flat salary. I've got their benefits covered. You just pay their flat salary. And I'll furnish all the mortar, all the tools, all the scaffolding." And when I would go down every two weeks to the project whatever phase it was in, I would take the kids and we would tour the project. And I don't think you're supposed to do that.

#### **Probably not.**

And it was amazing to see these construction guys that aren't used to interacting with kids teaching the kids or telling the kids what they're doing. And I mean it was so funny to see these guys and they felt so proud to be part of that building. And these kids were like worshipping these guys working on the buildings. It was a very good experience. Everybody was involved in that. It was just a great time. It was such great cooperation where you realize that there's these apprenticeship programs where people are standing eight hours a day behind the union halls learning how to do something and then they take it all apart and then they learn something else the next day. And then they take it all apart. Well, why not come and do something that is of value that's going to stand? And that's what that project was all about. It was really great; the kids were so much part of it.

Every one of the trades that came in and helped us donated everything. So at the time it was a million and a half dollars worth of stuff. And we didn't pay one dime for anything. It was all donated. I mean we did get a 25,000-dollar donation from I think the Sahara casino, Sue Lowden and Paul Lowden. And I think we got a 25,000-dollar grant if I'm not mistaken from the City of Henderson. So we actually had about \$50,000. And that got us started. And the rest was some great contractors, Frank Martin poured the slab for us. We had K W Pipeline. Ken Worthlin had two sons that went there. He said I'll do all the excavation and I'll do all the underground work. Well, we did that. And then I knew if we could get something that looked like it was coming out of the ground, we could get people to believe that we were really going to do this. So Frank Martin donated and came down and did the concrete for us.

I actually worked with about 12 guys from my firm. We actually finished the concrete. We
wanted to make it look like a real dirt floor in a mine so we wrapped our shoes up with burlap bags and walked on it. And we made it look like it was pretty authentic. It was a lot of fun.

Then we had this slab. So people could actually see, wow, this is the size of this thing. Then we were probably six months till I could get somebody to give us the block. And, boom, one day all this block showed up. And everybody said, wow, I guess we're really going to do it. Once we get Marnell Masonry in there to do the block work, then all we needed was a little bit of carpentry work to do the roof. And the rest of the guys got to finish. Just no big deal. That's when the apprenticeship union came in.

So that was a lot of fun and a lot of effort by a lot of people. But the end result is we've had over 50,000 Clark County School District students that had a chance now to tour a mine. So when they're learning Nevada history and mining -- and you have to be 18 years of age to be able to go underground in a mine. That's a federal law.

## I didn't know that.

It's a federal law because of the old days of the child labor laws. Before then kids worked in mines. And they said no more. You must be 18 years or older to go underground in a mine. That's a law. So kids can't ever do that even if it's some prearranged tour. So by doing this the kids get firsthand knowledge of what does it mean? Why is mining so important to Nevada? Up north that's where the mines are. There are no mines down here. So kids don't have parents that work in mines. They work in casinos. So that was a pretty unique thing.

Now the Nevada Mining Association is involved with our board. The Nevada Mining Association and the mines donate money every year to help. And so it's caught on quite well. But 50 or 60,000 kids have toured that. And that's a lot of bus trips and that's a lot of interaction with volunteer docents and everything.

#### So this is a community effort.

Oh, yeah. Absolutely. So I'd say that was probably one of the more fun projects that I got to work on. I think the other one -- obviously the airport with the kids. So I think those are really great ways of bringing the community involvement into your public projects that give people a chance to see that you do have -- when people go through the airport, their image of Las Vegas is they think everybody lives at Caesars Palace. And they don't realize we have kids here. We're not just going to hang a couple of little art displays up of a couple kids so when they walk through that airport and they see, wow, look at all these kids that did all this great work. It's so colorful.

The other thing that we did at the airport when we did one of the later wings at the airport is we wanted to do a competition for middle school kids. So what do you do for middle school kids? They're not going to be drawing with crayons and whatever. So we said let's do something a little more challenging. Let's have a paper airplane contest. So using an 8 1/2 by 11 piece of paper; design it any way you want, any colors you want, any designs on it you want, any configurations you want. And then it will be judged by aesthetics and by flight. And we went to the Foothill gymnasium at Foothill High School. And we had boxes of all these airplanes. And we picked three people that we thought would be perfect that nobody could complain about, "my kid's airplane could have flown further if so-and-so did it." And we had Randy Walker, director of aviation. We had George Tate. And we had General Billy McCoy from the Air Force. How could you complain? And they flew each airplane. And then the airplanes were measured, how far they went. And we picked out the 12 airplanes that were the nicest designed and flew the farthest.

And if you go into Satellite D -- and I'm not sure which wing it is -- but in Satellite D under one of our big skylights we took those little airplanes that were made like kids make airplanes, in all different configurations, and we took that little 8 1/2 by 11 airplane and we sent it out to a body shop and we had them make that out of sheet metal three feet long and paint it exactly the way the kid did. And we had them hanging and suspending from the skylight in the airport. And then underneath is about a four-foot-diameter plaque in the floor with a diagram of the airplane, the kid's name, forever. So those are the kinds of things...

And we did a similar project in Reno when we did the Reno courts. We said to the elementary schools we want you to show us by drawing pictures 8 ½ by 11 of what you like about your community in Reno. And the kids did all kinds of things which they thought were great things in Reno. Then we took their drawings, 8 ½ by 11, and we had them enlarged and had them sealed. We had them printed on a special type of Mylar so it was translucent. And then we had that sandwiched between two three-foot panes of glass. And at one of our stair towers, which goes three or four stories, there are all of these panels. So from the outside at night it lights up like a lantern. And when you're going up and down the stairs you see it backlit from the sun during the day. It's



McCarran Satellite D Terminal - Architectural



McCarran Paper Plane Mobile



Mills Lane Justice Center – Architectural

great.

So you're going to have 40 or 50 or 60 kids walking by there forever saying that's my art. And you're going to have 560 kids walking by the airport saying I worked on that. I think those are fun things. We don't get paid to do that. Nobody says we're going to give you a 5,000-dollar line item. In case of the wall in the airport, we probably spent, our firm, probably about \$50,000, \$100,000. McCaw School I know I had one of my employees work full time at the job site for six months coordinating the construction. On that project I estimate that we probably spent at least a quarter of a million dollars ourselves in that project. At the airport on those walls, we probably maybe \$200,000 of our time and our energy and our efforts that we don't get paid for.

## But it's priceless.

It's priceless. It's a much better way I think of reaching kids and the public. There's a lot of controversy in public art being a part of every project. So they're always trying to get a percent or two percent of the cost of the building put into art. So they go out and they hire an artist and they commission an artist. And the artist says here's my art and they put it in front of the building

## It's just not the same anymore.

It's not the same. And when you do it with the kids or the community -- I would like to see in more public buildings just a permanent way that they could have revolving public art. One of the things we did early on with the school district -- and I need to do more of this -- is we worked with one of the inner city schools a couple years ago with their art class. They didn't have a lot of anything. So we donated materials to help them out. They had an art auction with all the kids' artwork. So what we did was I think we bought about 24 pieces. It wasn't a lot of money. And then the teacher used the money to buy things.

But we took the art and sent it out and had it professionally framed, like \$100, \$200 a frame. So now all of sudden what's normally put on the refrigerator with a magnet or tape is now wow. And we put the name of the student and the name of the school. Then we matched up pictures that kind of --they're different kids' pictures, but maybe they were similar colors or themes that looked like if we put two pictures together they were part of a set. And then we put them in different locations around the school district at different offices like in the construction offices and then in the superintendent's office and in this office and that office. And then we would go every month or so



and rotate them.

Oh, and then what we did after we rotated them for the year is we then gave them to the students so they had theirs. And we told the students where they were going to be. So they were in public spaces. So Johnny could take his parents by the hand and say there's my artwork.

And I think that's the kind of fun sort of things that we are able to encourage that kind of thing or I guess spark that sort of thing that the typical person can't do that. The typical art teacher can't say, "I think I'm going to take these two pieces and I'm going to put them down there in city hall in the mayor's office."

### That's right.

They can't do that. I mean they could, but it's not going to happen. And I think we're able to do some of that stuff. I think every architect should do more of it. I mean that's the real community involvement.

And some of the young people that have worked here that have helped me do some of these projects, I hear from them all the time. They're in different parts of the country and they still talk. Like Paul was his name, Paul Brennan. He worked on the McCaw School with me. And he was down there working and he would talk to me every day a couple of times a day about construction problems and how things worked. He'll call every once in a while and he'll say, boy, I had so much fun when we did that McCaw School. It was a great learning experience for him. He'd go down and work with me with the kids. It was fun.

Every once in a while I'll run into a kid at a high school whenever I'm doing something. A couple of years ago I was at Foothill High School. And I heard this, hey, Mr. Snyder, Mr. Snyder. And this big guy comes running over to me and puts his hand on me. He says you remember me? I said no. He said I went to McCaw School. I worked with you on the mine. Don't you remember me? I couldn't do a pushup.

I had this one kid... the teachers would always give me the kids that maybe needed a little bit of extra help or something. So you'd have maybe 30 kids. There was this one little boy. You know how boys are. Let's line up. We're going outside. And I'd say, "okay, fall in, you're in the army, fall in, don't mess around." You'd always have some boys that are pushy or whatever. So I said, "okay, you guys, you guys right here, you're in the army. Drop down and give me ten pushups." Well, so okay. And this one kid, he couldn't do a pushup. It wasn't that I made them do it, but it was just kind a fun thing. And they started making fun of him. So I said all right, all right. So I pull him aside and I said, listen, do me a favor. Every day when you wake up I want you to try to do a pushup. And every night before you go to bed I want you to try to do a pushup. And when you can do ten pushups, I'm going to come down here and I'm going to get permission from Dr. Doubry, who is their principal, and I'm going to take you out for lunch. You and me are going to go out for a special lunch. He said really? I said, oh, yeah. So as I'm going back and forth to the school over the next couple of months -- I forget his name now. It'll come to me. He said, hey, Mr. Snyder. And I look and he would drop down. And he would say I can do six pushups. I said, okay, you're getting there, you're getting there. Well, he did ten pushups. And I went down and I got permission. I don't think you're allowed to do this. But Dr. Doubry said sure. And I took him over in my car over to McDonalds and we had lunch. And he just thought he was the greatest.

Well, that's the kid that yelled at me. And I mean this kid was -- and he said you remember you made me do pushups? I said yeah. He said, well, I'm on a football team now and I could probably do 50 pushups. I said good for you. Kyle was his name.

### Oh, that's wonderful.

So those are the kinds of things -- between him and the kid with the art. I think there's a lot of teachers that make that kind of an impression on kids as I see them at my school. And it's not always the straight A [students]. I think that's where all our emphasis always is. It's on like the straight A student, the kid that's got the scholarships. And the sad part of it is that if you are born to parents that are college educated, there is no doubt you're going to go to college, period, because, number one, you will probably start kindergarten and you will know how to read before you even start kindergarten. And the average kid is going to learn his alphabet in kindergarten and you already know how to read before you go to kindergarten because your parents know the importance of an education. And we have so many kids that don't have that opportunity. So how do we get those kids jump-started into this system or why do we always focus so much on scholarships for kids that have straight A's? I think we should be focused on scholarships for kids that are on the borderline of dropping out of high school because they have to help raise their family. That's the kid that needs the scholarship, not the straight A student. And the straight A students so often come from families

that are affluent enough to send them to college anyway.

Those are some of my pet peeves with the educational system that I think there's a lot of ways to educate people. But I think what really needs to happen with kids is you have to figure out a way to turn them on to what they want to do or expose them to things which they like to do. And then once that happens then show them a course of study that will get them educated, not teach them everything they need to know to get straight A's so they have an opportunity to go to school and do what they need to do - find out a little bit about what they want to do in the meantime so they have an ability to go off and pursue a career or pursue their interest by supplementing it with education. We have this you have to get straight A's. Why do I have to get straight A's? Because you want to be able to go to college. Well, what do I want to go to college for? Well, you'll find out when you get there, okay? Now I'm here and I spend all this money.

How many poor kids do you know are in the dilemma when they start their first year of college and they think they wanted to be this and they get halfway through it or they get through college and they want to be a doctor and all of a sudden they can't stand the sight of blood? Well maybe if you had an opportunity to jump on an EMT wagon once in a while when you were in high school and ride with those guys for the day and say I don't ever want to see that again. And I think maybe that's some of that life experiences that I think the army exposes people to that then allows them if they didn't come from parents that were college graduates that had the opportunity to read and study with their kids every night. After hard work all day long it's very difficult especially when you think of some of these poor single parents who are working extremely hard --

## And sometimes two jobs.

-- just to make ends meet to come home and then have to do all the chores around the house from making dinner to washing dishes and cleaning the house. And that's just assuming they only work an eight-hour-a-day job. And then to sit down with the kids and say, okay, let's go over your homework and how are you doing and what's going on here and never have a minute for themselves. I mean it is difficult.

Our system should be a little easier for those people. And, yet, all the emphasis is always on reward the straight A student and give them the scholarship. And I think there's so many people that

are very intelligent that never have an opportunity to become a straight A student because maybe they're working while they're going to high school. That's what I like to try to help out in my dealings with my kids as I'll call them.

Well, you're doing a great job. You're doing a wonderful service. And I think it's a great way to give back.

And I think everybody has that opportunity. And I've been extremely fortunate. I have been able to do and see things that the average person hasn't. And I feel blessed to be here to even talk about them sometimes.

You are. You're doubly blessed.

And now I have a granddaughter.

Oh, that's wonderful. How old is she?

She's ten months old [born in 2008].

#### That's great. What does your ring mean?

That ring was a wedding present and good luck piece because I got married and one month after I got married I got orders for Vietnam. And my wife bought me this as a wedding present and a good luck piece. And I wore that on this finger and it kept coming off. So I put it on this finger and then I couldn't get it off. Of course, now it's worn from all the years of construction and everything and now I can't get it off. But for a long time I could never get the ring off once I put it on that finger. But here I am.

### It has worked.

So it worked. So that's what that is. It's just a head with a turbine, a person with a turbine. [King Solomon]

Oh, yes. Now I see it.

So I've had that for -- 37 years I've been married [married in 1970].

### That's wonderful. I really appreciate your time so much.

Well, it was so nice talking to you. I hope I didn't bore you.

No. I was on the edge of my seat the entire time. This was wonderful. I thank you so much. Well, thank you.

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## Appendix

*Edutopia* article by Roberta Furger "Bringing the Rainforest (and the Ocean) to Las Vegas"

List of the Top 50 Architectural firms in the Country

From Architect, May 2010

Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects - No. 18

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**CONNECTING SCHOOL LIFE TO REAL LIFE** STUDENT **ENTREPRENEURS** CREATE **NEIGHBORHOOD** CHANGE

BUSINESS CHAMPIONS: OAKLAND'S FREMONT BUSINESS ACADEMY CELEBRATES WINNING AN INTERNATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP OVER 43 OTHER TEAMS.

by Ashley Ball

Faced with a truancy problem, would you think, "Burritos!"?

That's exactly what Fremont High School's Students for the Advancement of Global Enterprise (SAGE) in Oakland, California, did during the 2001-2002 school year. Noticing that students were leaving school for lunch and not returning, the SAGE team partnered with local restaurants to run a food cart on campus. Fresh burritos and sandwiches kept students on campus during lunch-and, more important, after. The project nearly halved the school's 70 percent truancy rate.

"Our experience with [SAGE] made us want to go to school, work hard, bring our academics up, and do more project-based learning and community service. ... All of us said, 'Why can't other kids learn like that? Why can't they be inspired by what they do every day, and apply it to the real world?""

- Student Nidya Baez www.glef.org/businesslearning.html

#### **Addressing School and Community Needs**

Students at Fremont High School's Business Academy (now integrated into a small schools model described under "The Biggest Project Yet" later in this article) participated in the SAGE program through required business classes and on an extracurricular basis. SAGE is the high school version of the college-level program Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE), which enlists mentors from the academic and business worlds to help students create socially conscious, profitable businesses.

For SAGE, students developed and implemented projects based on needs assessments of the high-poverty school and community. The year after the lunch cart project took first prize at the statewide SAGE competition (in spring 2002), the students threw themselves into creating still more projects while continuing to operate the lunch program.



# BRINGING THE RAINFOREST (& the ocean) TO LAS VEGAS

by Roberta Furger GLEF Staff Writer

This school year, students in the Clark County School District in Nevada will grow medicinal plants from seed and plant them in a rainforest. They'll care for seahorses, anemones, and puffer fish in a working marine lab, and travel into the deep recesses of a gold mine. And they'll benefit from these incredible learning experiences without ever leaving their schools in Henderson, a suburb of Las Vegas.

Thanks to a multi-year collaboration between school personnel, community members, and businesspeople from throughout the Las Vegas area, the Clark County School District is now home to a 3,200-square-foot rainforest, a marine lab with dozens of species of marine life, and a museum-quality replica of a working gold mine. These unique learning environments (each costing more than \$1 million) were built entirely through donations and

volunteer support and are part of an innovative program designed to make science learning come alive for elementary students throughout the district.

### **Real Science in a Hands-On Setting**

To Catherine Maggiore, principal at John C. Vanderburg Elementary School, science just isn't science if it isn't handson. "It's easy to just open a textbook and teach science," says the educator of 25 years. "But students aren't going to learn science from a textbook." And at Vanderburg, she adds proudly, "They don't have to."

Vanderburg Elementary in Henderson is home to an honestto-goodness rainforest, complete with rare plants, cockatoos, and a six-foot-long iguana (named "Iggy," of course). To walk through this lush environment, you'd never know that it was once an insufferably hot courtyard that was rarely used by students, staff, or visitors. But some big dreams and hard work turned the once unbearable space into a living, breathing science lab for students throughout the district.

"The biosphere enables all of our science instruction to be hands-on," says Maggiore. In addition to learning about this vital and endangered ecosystem, students are caretakers of this special habitat, including watching over the animals and nurturing rare plant species from seeds. Included in the space is a traditional science lab, where all students meet for class once a week with the school's science literacy specialist.

A few miles away, students at Estes McDoniel Elementary School, another K-5 school in the district, spend their science classes in a bona fide marine lab, complete with tanks full of hard and soft coral, sharks, eels, a clown fish, and more. Although science instruction at McDoniel isn't focused exclusively on the study of marine life, Science Teacher Kim Adams integrates lessons from the lab into the science curriculum at each grade level.

#### **Students as Experts, Guides**

Besides the regular opportunity to engage in hands-on science activities, students at Vanderburg, McDoniel, and Gordon M. McCaw Elementary School (home to the replica gold mine) are frequently called upon to share and show what they know with students and teachers from throughout their district and the entire state of Nevada. Fifth graders at each of these schools serve as docents during weekly (and sometimes daily) field trips, guiding visiting classes through a series of interactive lessons built around their specific thematic focus.

> Each year, hundreds of students visit the Vanderburg rainforest, where students like Avery are their teachers and their guides. Avery is starting his second year as a rainforest guide and says the experience has helped him to grow more confident and to learn how to project his voice.

> "I used to be pretty shy," explains Avery. "I'm a lot better now."



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Bill Snyder, a partner with Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects in Las Vegas, wasn't looking for something new to do when he received a call several years ago from Scheideman about a project that had been proposed by two teachers at McCaw Elementary School. The teachers, explained Scheideman, wanted to build a small papier-mâché mine and were looking for a little architectural advice. As a favor to Scheideman, Snyder attended a meeting to learn more about the fledgling

become a multi-room replica of a working gold mine. "People go into the rainforest and cut down what they see, most of the time so they can raise cattle or farm. But eventually, they have the way." to move because the soil is so poor from the

lack of trees," says Avery. It's a destructive cycle, adds the well-spoken fifth grader. "Farmers use slashand-burn techniques to make room for their farm, but then find that the land can't support them."

the rainforests of the world.

When students finish the tour and activities, Avery says he tries to leave them with one simple thought: recycle. "It's the little things that can make a difference," says this wisebeyond-his-years 10-year-old." If we would just reuse more of our stuff, we wouldn't need to rely so much on the rainforest."

#### Learning Across Generations

The students of Clark County aren't the only ones benefiting from the district's innovative learning environments. One of the beauties of these projects, says Dale Scheideman, director of the district's new school and facility planning department, is that they bring together an eclectic group of people from schools, businesses, and the surrounding community to support the students.

"It's a way for people to give back," says Scheideman. "It's not necessarily just the students who benefit," he adds. "Many older docents have seen their lives change by working with the children on these projects. It's given them a new lease on life."

Dorothy Webb, a retiree from Wisconsin, has been volunteering with the McCaw School of Mines for nearly eight years. Her "volunteer" job of coordinating field trips and scheduling the 35 senior docents fills up 30 to 40 hours each week, but she wouldn't have it any other way.

"This gives me a reason to get up in the morning," says Webb. "At 73 years old, I'm doing things I never thought I would do," she adds, "and I'm working with children and other adults who've become my friends. My family."

"I said I would be involved on one condition," recalls Snyder, "that the students were involved in the project every step of

mine project. Little did he know that the "little mine" would

And that's exactly what happened. Students met regularly with staff and the architectural and building team to discuss the facility, comment on the design, and recommend new features. They spent time on the construction site itself, discussing the project with the construction crew and learning firsthand about the hows and whys of construction, as well as the many tools of their trade-from jackhammers to double-head nails. They wrote letters to potential funders, encouraged their parents to join in the efforts, and even designed the plaque for the dedication ceremonies.

"The students built that mine," says Snyder, "just as much as the volunteer construction workers built it with their labor or the parents through their fundraising."

Besides the McCaw mine project, Snyder has been involved in designing and building both the Estes McDoniel marine lab and the Vanderburg rainforest. And his pioneering work has been the inspiration for the district's two latest projects-a butterfly habitat and a walk-through simulation of the human body, both of which are still in the design phase.

For Snyder, who's volunteered hundreds of hours, it's an opportunity to expose students to different people and different environments, "to give students a chance to grow and excel outside of the traditional classroom."

"My dream," says Snyder, "is that every school would have a project like this."

More information on these projects, including photos, lesson plans, and detailed histories, is available at the schools' Web sites: McCaw School of Mines: www.ccsd.net/schools/mccaw/; Estes McDoniel Marine Lab: www.ccsd.net/ schools/mcdoniel/; Vanderburg Elementary Rainforest: www.ccsd.net/schools/ vanderburg/.



1	-10		43 ARCHITECT MAY 2010
RANK	FIRM		
1	SKIDMORE, OWINGS & MERRILL • New York • Revenue (range): \$200-\$349.9 million • Employees: 500-999 • SOM's exceptional haul of awards in 2009—including four AIA Honor Awards— helped launch them into the top spot, despite a dip in revenue. SCORING: Revenue per employee: 202; Sustainable practices: 232; Awards: 394		
2	<b>PERKINS+WILL • Chicago • Revenue: \$350 million or more • Employees: 1,000 or more •</b> Once again, Perkins+Will proves that its blood runs green. Its commitment to sustainability and design chops earn green, too. Revenue per employee: 187; Sustainable practices: 363; Awards: 271		
3	DLR GROUP • Omaha, Neb. • Revenue: \$70–\$99.9 million • Employees: 250–499 • DLR has parlayed its K–12 and justice expertise into a rising national profile, one enhanced by its recent acquisition of WWCOT. Revenue per employee: 125; Sustainable practices: 299; Awards: 351	Possibly the largest school-design firm in the world, <b>DLR Group</b> gained entree into the large California market—and into China—earlier this year when it	
4	FENTRESS ARCHITECTS • Denver • Revenue: \$100–\$199.9 million • Employees: 100–249 • Now that government and infrastructure work are the name of the game, few firms are better positioned than Fentress, an aviation and public-sector expert. Revenue per employee: 471; Sustainable practices: 232; Awards: 38	acquired WWCUI, which had four offices in California and one in Shanghai.	
5	HOK • St. Louis • Revenue: \$350 million or more • Employees: 1,000 or more • Despite the split from its former subsidiary, HOK Sport Venue Event (now Populous), in late 2008, HOK is holding steady in our top five. Revenue per employee: 187; Sustainable practices: 315; Awards: 224		
6	VJAA • Minneapolis • Revenue: \$2.5–\$4.9 million • Employees: 10–19 • Vincent James and colleagues had a terrific 2009, scooping major awards for projects in Beirut, New Orleans, and their home state of Minnesota. Revenue per employee: 138; Sustainable practices: 115; Awards: 400		
7	ZGF ARCHITECTS • Portland, Ore. • Revenue: \$100–\$199.9 million • Employees: 250–499 • ZGF is as green as its Pacific Northwest roots would suggest, while its strength in healthcare, infrastructure, and government work has kept it chugging through the recession. Revenue per employee: 220; Sustainable practices: 299; Awards: 133	Next up for <b>ZGF Architects</b> : The firm will be lead architect on 2.1 million square feet of office space within a federal megaproject, the new Department of Homeland Security campus in Washington,	
8	EPSTEIN • Chicago • Revenue: \$100-\$199.9 million • Employees: 100-249 • Employee-owned Epstein rocketed up the list from 63rd place last year. Want to know why? See the firm profile on page 45. Revenue per employee: 471; Sustainable practices: 81; Awards: 73	D.C. The contract is worth \$61 million. EYP Architecture & Engineering (22) is on the design team.	
9	ADRIAN SMITH + GORDON GILL ARCHITECTS • Chicago • 2009 revenue: \$100-\$199.9 million • Employees: 100-249 • Since hanging their shingle in 2006, SOM veteran Smith and partners Gill and Robert Forest have pushed high-square-footage projects toward greater energy efficiency through technological innovation. Revenue per employee: 471; Sustainable practices: 95; Awards: 13	➔ The scores cited here were generated by our research consultant from firm data, and do not correspond directly to that data. (For example, an	WWW.ARCH
10	GENSLER • San Francisco • Revenue: \$350 million or more • Employees: 1,000 or more • The executive architect of Las Vegas' CityCenter, 2,000-person-strong Gensler proves more every year that designing interiors is just one of its many diverse talents. Revenue per employee: 187; Sustainable practices: 278; Awards: 108	awards score of 38 does not signify 38 awards won.) All firm data was self-reported and could not be independently verified. For more on scoring and methodology, go to architectmagazine.com.	HILECTMAGAZINE.COM
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ANK	FIRM	_
11	HKS • Dallas • Revenue: \$200-\$349.9 million • Employees: 500-999 Revenue per employee: 202; Sustainable practices: 259; Awards: 108	
12	NBBJ • Seattle • Revenue: \$200–\$349.9 million • Employees: 500–999 Revenue per employee: 202; Sustainable practices: 238; Awards: 128	
13	FRANK HARMON ARCHITECT • Raleigh, N.C. • Revenue: \$1–\$2.4 million • Employees: 2–4 Revenue per employee: 321; Sustainable practices: 121; Awards: 114	
14	MARK CAVAGNERO ASSOCIATES • San Francisco • Revenue: \$5–\$9.9 million • Employees: 20–49 Revenue per employee: 118; Sustainable practices: 174; Awards: 262	Mark Cavagnero Associates mak its ARCHITECT 50 debut at 14th place, due in large part to the Sa
15	PAYETTE • Boston • Revenue: \$50–\$69.9 million • Employees: 100–249 Revenue per employee: 189; Sustainable practices: 198; Awards: 163	Francisco headquarters it designers for Chronicle Books, which won an AIA Honor Award for Interior
16	SMITHGROUP • Detroit • Revenue: \$100-\$199.9 million • Employees: 500-999 Revenue per employee: 110; Sustainable practices: 198; Awards: 235	Architecture last year.
17	LORD, AECK & SARGENT • Atlanta • Revenue: \$30-\$39.9 million • Employees: 100-249 Revenue per employee: 110; Sustainable practices: 254; Awards: 168	
18	TATE SNYDER KIMSEY ARCHITECTS • Henderson, Nev. • Revenue: \$10-\$14.9 million • Employees: 20-49 Revenue per employee: 196; Sustainable practices: 254; Awards: 68	Now 50 years old, <b>Tate Snyder</b> <b>Kimsey Architects</b> renovated its Henderson, Nev., headquarters
19	ANSHEN + ALLEN • San Francisco • Revenue: \$50–\$69.9 million • Employees: 100–249 Revenue per employee: 189; Sustainable practices: 302; Awards: 21	to achieve LEED-EB certification in 2005, making their office the first LEED-certified building in the state of Nevada.
20	EHDD ARCHITECTURE • San Francisco • Revenue: \$10-\$14.9 million • Employees: 50-99 Revenue per employee: 92; Sustainable practices: 288; Awards: 125	
21	DESIGNLAB • Boston • Revenue: \$2.5–\$4.9 million • Employees: 10–19 Revenue per employee: 138; Sustainable practices: 236; Awards: 114	no 12 38
22	EYP ARCHITECTURE & ENGINEERING • Albany, N.Y. • Revenue: \$50-\$69.9 million • Employees: 250-499 Revenue per employee: 88; Sustainable practices: 339; Awards: 60	
23	ESKEW+DUMEZ+RIPPLE • New Orleans • Revenue: \$10–\$14.9 million • Employees: 20–49 Revenue per employee: 196; Sustainable practices: 142; Awards: 148	······································
24	CANNON DESIGN • Grand Island, N.Y. • Revenue: \$100–\$199.9 million • Employees: 500–999 Revenue per employee: 110; Sustainable practices: 184; Awards: 187	
25	SERA ARCHITECTS • Portland, Ore. • Revenue: \$10-\$14.9 million • Employees: 50-99 Revenue per employee: 92; Sustainable practices: 339; Awards: 44	
26	PGAL • Houston • Revenue: \$40–\$49.9 million • Employees: 100–249 Revenue per employee: 141; Sustainable practices: 331; Awards: –	240
27	GOODY CLANCY • Boston • Revenue: \$20–\$24.9 million • Employees: 50–99 Revenue per employee: 165; Sustainable practices: 272; Awards: 36	- 99
28	TSOI/KOBUS & ASSOCIATES • Cambridge, Mass. • Revenue: \$20-\$24.9 million • Employees: 50-99 Revenue per employee: 165; Sustainable practices: 230; Awards: 76	Cambridge, Massbased Tsoi/ Kobus & Associates is one of the biggest movers this year, vaulting up from 127th place in 2009.
29	FXFOWLE ARCHITECTS • New York • Revenue: \$25–\$29.9 million • Employees: 100–249 Revenue per employee: 86; Sustainable practices: 310; Awards: 73	
30	RDG PLANNING & DESIGN • Des Moines, Iowa • Revenue: \$25-\$29.9 million • Employees: 100-249	

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FIRM BRPH • Melbourne, Fla. • Revenue: \$50-\$69.9 million • Employees: 100-249 Revenue per employee: 189; Sustainable practices: 278; Awards: -HDR ARCHITECTURE • Omaha, Neb. • Revenue: \$200-\$349.9 million • Employees: 1,000 or more Revenue per employee: 121; Sustainable practices: 259; Awards: 84 WEBER THOMPSON • Seattle • Revenue: \$2.5-\$4.9 million • Employees: 20-49 Revenue per employee: 59; Sustainable practices: 262; Awards: 142 COOK+FOX ARCHITECTS • New York • Revenue: \$2.5-\$4.9 million • Employees: 20-49 Revenue per employee: 59; Sustainable practices: 318; Awards: 82 GUND PARTNERSHIP • Cambridge, Mass. • Revenue: \$5-\$9.9 million • Employees: 20-49 Revenue per employee: 118; Sustainable practices: 264; Awards: 76 ELLERBE BECKET, AN AECOM COMPANY\* • Minneapolis • Revenue: \$100-\$199.9 million • Employees: 250–499 (\*Ellerbe Becket entered the ranking separately from AECOM, its parent company as of October 2009.) Revenue per employee: 220; Sustainable practices: 184; Awards: 54 SASAKI ASSOCIATES • Watertown, Mass. • Revenue: \$50-\$69.9 million • Employees: 250-499 Revenue per employee: 88; Sustainable practices: 190; Awards: 179 MCLARAND VASQUEZ EMSIEK & PARTNERS • Irvine, Calif. • Revenue: \$40-\$49.9 million • Employees: 50-99 Revenue per employee: 330; Sustainable practices: 95; Awards: 23 CO ARCHITECTS • Los Angeles • Revenue: \$30-\$39.9 million • Employees: 50-99 Revenue per employee: 257; Sustainable practices: 166; Awards: 21 EHRLICH ARCHITECTS • Culver City, Calif. • Revenue: \$5-\$9.9 million • Employees: 20-49 Revenue per employee: 118; Sustainable practices: 166; Awards: 159 STUDIOS ARCHITECTURE • San Francisco • Revenue: \$30-\$39.9 million • Employees: 100-249 Revenue per employee: 110; Sustainable practices: 198; Awards: 133 AYERS/SAINT/GROSS ARCHITECTS AND PLANNERS • Baltimore • Revenue: \$30-\$39.9 million • Employees: 100-249 Revenue per employee: 110; Sustainable practices: 272; Awards: 49 ANN BEHA ARCHITECTS • Boston • Revenue: \$2.5-\$4.9 million • Employees: 10-19 Revenue per employee: 138; Sustainable practices: 134; Awards: 148 PAGESOUTHERLANDPAGE • Houston • Revenue: \$70-\$99.9 million • Employees: 250-499 Revenue per employee: 125; Sustainable practices: 214; Awards: 79 SPECTOR GROUP • Woodbury, N.Y. • Revenue: \$20-\$24.9 million • Employees: 50-99 Revenue per employee: 165; Sustainable practices: 160; Awards: 91 TRO JUNG BRANNEN • Boston • Revenue: \$40-\$49.9 million • Employees: 100-249 46 Revenue per employee: 141; Sustainable practices: 224; Awards: 41 GOETTSCH PARTNERS • Chicago • Revenue: \$20-\$24.9 million • Employees: 50-99 Revenue per employee: 165; Sustainable practices: 174; Awards: 63 WESTLAKE REED LESKOSKY • Cleveland • Revenue: \$25-\$29.9 million • Employees: 100-249 Revenue per employee: 86; Sustainable practices: 192; Awards: 117 HANBURY EVANS WRIGHT VLATTAS & CO. • Norfolk, Va. • Revenue: \$20-\$24.9 million • Employees: 50-99 Revenue per employee: 165; Sustainable practices: 134; Awards: 97 WILLIAM RAWN ASSOCIATES • Boston • Revenue: \$5-\$9.9 million • Employees: 20-49 Revenue per employee: 118; Sustainable practices: 214; Awards: 63

BRPH isn't the most familiar name in AEC—yet. A leader in the aviation, industrial, and government markets, it recently opened offices in Charleston, S.C., and Washington, D.C.—the latter to better serve federal clients such as the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Department of Commerce.

McLarand Vasquez Emsiek & Partners cracked the Top 50 with ease, but the past year hasn't been painless: A former employee was arrested this February and charged with embezzling more than \$1.9 million from the firm.

#### Westlake Reed Leskosky was

founded by Abram Garfield—son of President James A. Garfield—in 1905. Today the Cleveland-based firm offers a distinctive combination of specialties: healthcare, historic preservation, BIM, and acoustic, A/V, and related technologies. ARCHITECT MAY 2010