

Allen & Hoshall's Legacy Spans Memphis

By LANCE WIEDOWER

To an outside observer, the building process might seem segmented with planning, architecture, engineering and consulting firms all providing necessary aspects to the finished project.

Allen & Hoshall tries to simplify the process with its comprehensive offering of all those services and more. Whether it's mechanical or plumbing engineering for a building project or wastewater system engineering for a utility project, land surveying or construction management, Allen & Hoshall covers the gamut.

The Memphis-based design firm began in 1915 and today has a staff of more than 100 professionals working out of offices in Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga and Knoxville, Tenn., and Jackson, Miss.

[Harry Pratt](#) has experienced many of the ups and downs at the company. A civil engineer, he has been with Allen & Hoshall for 41 years. He was elected president of the employee-owned company in late 2015.

"When I got here we were still drawing everything by hand," Pratt said. "We had calculators. The computers we carry in our pockets didn't exist. The complete evolution from pen and pencil on drawing paper to what we do on computers now is phenomenal."

Pratt, like many of an earlier generation of engineering and architecture professionals, was trained to think in two dimensions. Now, he said, they draw and present in 3-D and even sometimes in virtual reality.

Pratt said those technological advances are reshaping how the industry operates. As more 3-D screens are introduced into personal and professional settings, taking advantage of the software has been an important way for the firm to evolve.

"We think this is a chance for design professionals to demonstrate what this will look like before we ever pick up a hammer, nail or saw," he said. "We've been working on it a couple of years now. We can take you inside the house, warehouse or building and be able to look up, down and all around and make sure it feels right."

Being a full-service firm has helped bring key components of projects together. As architects take ideas and draw them out, engineers begin putting up skeletons of a project as electrical engineers hang lights. All of these disciplines are trying to fit in the same space around each other at the same time.

And technology is there to help these various disciplines communicate to make the project come together.

"We build these projects in virtual reality to look for conflicts," Pratt said. "It's easier to solve a conflict with a computer than it is in the field. It's a more integrated approach."

Allen & Hoshall has worked with a wide range of clients. From federal down to state and local offices, the firm has worked with government entities for decades. The firm's handiwork touches a variety of projects around Memphis and Shelby County including [FedEx Corp.](#), the new Chisca Hotel redevelopment on Main Street downtown, education facilities and health care properties, such as Methodist University Hospital.



Allen & Hoshall vice president Harry Pratt, center, with Charles Bunniran and Heather Ashbrand.

(Memphis News/Andrew J. Breig)

When Pratt joined the firm in 1975 there was one office located in Midtown Memphis. Within three months a regional office opened in Jackson, Miss. Offices have come and gone in places such as Tunica and Hernando.

“We look for areas where the services we offer are in demand,” Pratt said. “We have to sell our services. We look to go places where there is a lot of development activity. We look for hotbeds and look to see what competition is in the area and if we can compete and win our share of work. If we don’t think we can sustain an office we won’t.”

Allen & Hoshall has weathered storms in its 100 years, including the 2008 recession that crippled the real estate and construction industries. Pratt said the firm wasn’t “bloated,” but it was larger than it is today.

Selective and strategic downsizing helped streamline the firm. Business in Memphis continues to ramp up, but it’s not quite to the point of the construction boom the firm is a part of in Nashville. But there are projects in this market, including a new career technology center in DeSoto County and the Main-to-Main project that should be completed this year.

Pratt said the firm is especially proud of the legacy projects it has played a role in through the years, including what he said are most of the major landmark buildings in Downtown Memphis.

“All of the buildings more than two or three stories tall we were involved in,” he said. “It might have just been electrical or heating or air, but that’s something we’re proud of.”

Looking to the future, Pratt said the firm’s leadership wants to expand its architectural services. He also said the aviation market, particularly with the design and construction of hangers, has real potential for future growth.

Of course the firm already has left a major footprint on the Memphis landscape in aviation, and it can be seen and heard approaching Memphis International Airport beginning about 11 nightly.

The firm has worked with the Memphis-Shelby County Airport Authority for decades, including the creation of the parallel runways in the 1980s and the World Runway that sees the massive FedEx jets heading off to Asia and Europe nightly.