

On the job

Shawn McGuinness

Architect and design project manager
Cutler Associates Inc., Worcester

Age: 42

Family: Two daughters

Native of: Grafton

Current residence: Hopkinton

Time in current job: Nine years

What do you do?

"I do a variety of things. I have my own projects that I am the designer for, and I also work as a liaison between outside architects, when we are engaged in a design-build project with an outside architect — someone other than Cutler Design. So, I am handed a brand new design project, I would meet weekly with the client and put together a program. Once I have the program established, I start sketching. There are usually several design options a client is presented with while we are working in the early stages. When we've all agreed upon a design direction, then we'll draw it on the computer and turn it into construction drawings. Cutler has an in-house estimating department, so we are able to put a price tag on the designs as we go along. When the client has agreed on the design and estimate, then we get to work building it."

How did you get into this field?

"Since high school, I've known I wanted to be an architect. I am very artistic, and no, you don't need to be good in math. I started with a fondness for single-family residential design, but I prefer the dynamics of a larger office rather than a small, two-person residential firm. I also have strong technical skills, and architecture is a perfect way to combine both skill and hobby. Initially, I went to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York, which is extremely technical. But it wasn't a good fit for me because I wanted to be in the workplace as soon as I got out of high school. I left RPI and started working in the profession. Then I went to school at night and finished up my degree (at the Boston Architectural Center)."

What's the best part of your job?

"Watching something be built that I've designed. I also get a lot of satisfaction from helping other people, and with architecture I can utilize a skill that a lot of people benefit from, including clients, users and sometimes spectators."

What's the worst part?

"Punch list! I'm not a very critical person, so it's hard for me to put together a punch list of items and hand it off to our field crew. (A punch list is a list of items that need to be completed.)"

What have you learned from this job?

"I've learned how to interact with a huge variety of personalities. As years go by, I've learned that I have a skill that a lot of people appreciate and value, and that a lot of people don't have."

Is there a project you are especially proud of, or like mothers always tell their children, "I love each of you just as much as the other"?

"The work I've done at Bancroft School (in Worcester) — the new K-8 facility (McDonough Center) and the Fuller Science Center renovations. The client was really a wonderful group of people, and we don't always get that in a client. They were very appreciative and very cooperative, and very easy and enjoyable to work with. (These projects are my favorite) because I was designing spaces for kids, for people in general."



T&G Staff/PAUL KAPTEYN

Architect Shawn McGuinness of Cutler Associates Inc., Worcester, stands in front of the McDonough Center, a building she designed at Bancroft School in Worcester. The McDonough Center serves kindergarten through Grade 8 students.

Can good architecture change how we work, live and relate to each other?

"I think it can. There is such a thing as hostile architecture. As the name implies, it would tend to be a little more cold and less enjoyable to look at as well as work within. There are ways of detailing both inside and outside of a building to create warmth and comfort."

Give me an example from your own work of how design changed the community it was applied to?

"This particular building (McDonough Center) replaced an old, 1950s structure. It was extremely linear, and there were no interaction spaces such as we are sitting in now. There was no lobby, no informal gathering space. I was able to put those features in this building that did not exist before. Those features helped enforce the group learning Bancroft seems to specialize in."

When you are assigned a project, what happens even before you pick up a pencil and begin to draw?

"I ask a lot of questions and I do a lot of listening. I

think listening is critical, because I need to interpret what they are saying to me in order to identify their needs. Once I know their needs, I can start designing spaces that meet their needs."

Worcester has interesting architecture, much of it formally preserved. What's your favorite building in the city?

"Worcester has some beautiful old Victorian homes, and there are some beautiful old buildings along Main Street I would love to see brought back to life."

What about your most favorite building — wherever it might be?

"The Sydney Opera House (designed by architect Jorn Utzon of Denmark; completed in 1973). It's very organic looking, and looks like it could take flight. It looks like a pure piece of art."

Compiled by: Business editor Andi Esposito

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