

Garmann/Miller building on past success

Architectural, engineering firm opens second office in Dublin

By AMY KRONENBERGER
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MINSTER — Garmann/Miller Architects-Engineers has left its mark on the area in ways few other businesses can boast.

From churches to schools to businesses, many well-recognized buildings in communities across the area contain Garmann/Miller's signature. Yet the 25-year-old firm is just getting started as it continues to expand its presence beyond the Grand Lake area and across Ohio.

The Minster business while celebrating its silver anniversary in 2018 also reached the milestone of opening a second office in Dublin. CEO Eric Baltzell, P.E., said the company has seen significant growth statewide, so establishing an office in central Ohio will help attract new business that adds to the company's already strong K-12 and higher education buildings portfolio.

"Having a presence in the capital region allows us to expand not only in the K-12 world but in the mixed-use, higher education and private sector markets," Baltzell said.

Expansion is nothing new to Garmann/Miller as the business has known nothing but growth. Founded in 1993 by architects Brad Garmann and Bruce Miller, the pair added a clerical position within a few months and hired two more architects by the end of the first year. The firm's first project was a renovation at the Maria Stein Retreat Center, followed by projects at Stammen-Paragon Insurance in Celina, Minster Bank in Sidney and Osgood State Bank in Fort Loramie.

The new Parkway Local Schools and Minster Middle School buildings along with renovations at Marion Local and St. Henry schools catapulted the company into the K-12 market early on.

"Garmann/Miller grew quickly," Baltzell said. "Initially we focused on Auglaize, Mercer and Shelby counties, and over the years we've broadened our reach... A milestone for our firm was adding engineering in 2001 to complement our architectural services."

That growth would not have been possible without staying ahead of emerging trends and technology. Baltzell noted the staff is always looking at new technology and professional-development opportunities.

"Tools such as building information modeling, or BIM, allow for 3-D graphics that accurately capture reality with features such as aerial imagery and fly-through functionality," he said. "This allows a client to see exactly what their building will look like."

Technological advancement, Baltzell continued, has made the design process more extensive while also providing a more complete and accurate picture of the project as a whole.

"Years ago, a large school project would have maybe 50 drawings and now it could be 250," he said. "There's the need to communicate to eliminate the potential for errors and omissions, but we also do it because we feel it helps answer questions before they become questions in the field. We also plan more technology into the design phase with security access control systems, cameras — anything that's electronically controlled — than we did in previous decades."

Technological advancement also plays a crucial role in the building being designed. When planning a school, for example, designers must make security and

computer/internet availability a top priority.

"As the demand for bandwidth and consumption increases, building design must adapt to and be in lockstep with modern technology," Baltzell said. "For example, a gigabit passive optical network, or GPON, is a system that allows us to push more data at a faster rate using fiber cables; we've incorporated this for Fostoria City Schools. It's more energy efficient, requires less equipment, has lower maintenance requirements and gives students and teachers the benefit of faster digital communications, which makes the learning process more productive."

The designers then must create a building around the technology that fits the client's desired aesthetics and, in schools, must provide the best possible learning environment.

"Studies now show a link between improved student performance and building components such as natural light, ventilation, acoustics and furniture," Baltzell said. "We conceptualize spaces that are warm and encourage interaction, and then we collaborate with a school district to deliver solutions."

The many different moving parts in a building design can be difficult to juggle, making communication and collaboration essential.

"For example," Baltzell explained, "with all the security measures in door hardware, the locks and how it ties to a fire alarm and electric, all these parts are necessary, but if one component doesn't function properly, it's difficult to figure out. One little glitch could take days, weeks or more to figure out. All these engineering facets of the mechanical, electrical and plumbing side are put in to make the building run more energy efficient, but when they don't work, that's when it becomes complicated. And that's why our design drawings have become more detailed; we need to convey lessons learned into a new project."

This also is why Garmann/Miller has expanded beyond just architecture and engineering over the years to also provide services in electrical, plumbing and mechanical engineering; landscape architecture; interior design; technology design; graphic design; and construction administration, providing a one-stop-shop for clients.

"Having this range of disciplines not only streamlines the communication process, it ensures a higher level of quality and performance



Dan Melograna/The Daily Standard

Andrew Huelsman, P.E., mechanical engineer, left, and Cindy Pottkotter, designer, roll out blueprints to show Garmann/Miller Architects-Engineers CEO Eric Baltzell on Jan. 21 at the company's Minster office.

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— Eric Baltzell, company CEO

Garmann/Miller at a glance

Name of business: Garmann/Miller Architects-Engineers
Address: 38 S. Lincoln Drive, Minster
Founded: 1993
CEO: Eric Baltzell
Number of employees: 55

when our teams can collaborate under one roof," Baltzell said. "It also allows for better coordination that translates to reduced delays and change orders during construction."

Garmann/Miller has made its mark on school design throughout the state, doing four to five large projects a year, he said, including the upcoming new building at New Bremen Local Schools and the ongoing renovations at Minster Junior/Senior High School. Larger school projects completed in 2018 were K-12 buildings in Ayersville and Liberty Center and a new community center in Lincolnview.

The firm's expertise in energy and environmental design practices, along with its experience working with the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission on state-funded projects, has made it a trusted partner in new school construction, he added.

Schools aren't the company's only niche, however. Garmann/Miller handles about 100-125 projects each year with a diverse portfolio covering education, civic, health care, parks and recreation and even some area churches, including the Celina First Church of God, Baltzell said.

"We've built a solid reputation with municipalities, too, having completed the Celina Municipal Court renovation, and this year we'll provide designs on a new probate/juvenile court in Findlay for Hancock County," he said.

Baltzell and COO Chris Monnin were hired as engineers in 2001, when the engineering department was added. Garmann and Miller transitioned leadership of the company to Baltzell and Monnin in 2017. Garmann and Miller still serve the company as principals and licensed architects. The firm added eight new team members in 2018, bringing the total number of employees to 55 with open positions still available

at both the Minster and Dublin offices.

Baltzell said protecting the environment for future generations will continue to be one of the company's top priorities as he and his staff look to the future.

"Implementing sustainable, green practices while improving efficiency, functionality and comfort will affect how we design," he said of the coming years. "We're driving progress toward greener schools by choosing eco-friendly build-

ing materials and establishing energy-efficient design elements."

Eight of the firm's schools have earned Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Gold Certification while nine have earned a silver status from the U.S. Green Building Council. Garmann/Miller also is the first firm in Ohio to register a LEED for Schools v4 project — a performance-based program with measurable results throughout a building's life cycle.

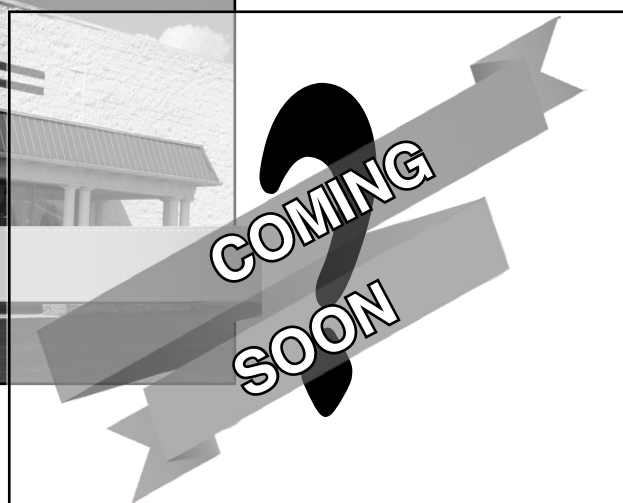
The company in 2018 accepted an award from American Electric Power Ohio for being a recognized Energy Efficiency Solutions Provider and earned a national ranking of 96 on Building Design+Construction magazine's Giants 300 Report for top green architecture firms.

As the company looks to expand into the future, its leaders and staff have stayed rooted in their small-town values.

"We at Garmann/Miller take pride in what we do and where we live. Our team's work ethic is what drives us in providing the level of quality and service our clients deserve," Baltzell said. "Our client relationships are the foundation of our success, and we're excited to forge new partnerships in central Ohio and beyond."

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