

Some Things Get Better with Age 20 Years of Success in Architectural Design

by Cynthia Scanlon



Robert Kubicek, Eddie Basha and Bruce Bosley, president of RKA



ABCO Center designed for the Barclay Group



Smitty's bigger,
brighter, better interior.

When Robert Kubicek explored his University of Arizona catalog in search of a college major, he dismissed pre-med as a life pursuit, even though his father was a noted surgeon. Instead, he chose architecture, a notable profession for which he thought he might have an affinity.

"It was the only thing in the book that didn't require a foreign language," he quips.

But don't let that self-effacing demeanor fool you. His competition doesn't. In the 20 years since Kubicek started his firm, Robert Kubicek Architects and Associates (RKA) has grown from a small shop of budding architects working side by side to a powerhouse in the architectural industry. The firm now boasts offices in Phoenix, Huntington Beach, California, and Las Vegas, Nevada, with clients nationwide, and an annual construction value volume of \$200 million.

Those who have been fortunate enough to work with Robert Kubicek and his staff don't find their two decades of success all that surprising. Few architects can keep up with Kubicek and his staff's drive for work excellence or begin to meet his superior customer service. It is their attention to customer's needs that has garnered the firm generous praise and repeat work from some of the biggest names in the west.

"Bob has uniquely stayed tuned to his tenants needs in terms of access, visibility, and parking, while keeping in mind the local jurisdiction's rules and regulations," says Lee Hanley, president of VeStar Development Co. and Kubicek's long-time friend and client. "He has the discipline of staying tuned to the client as opposed to becoming an artist. It's important to stayed tuned to your client's needs and not invent the Taj Mahal."

Valley developer John F. Long is another long-time client and friend of Kubicek. "He's done extensive architectural work for us on several shopping centers," he says. "I was impressed with the quality of his work, and he's still working for me today."

Long believes that Kubicek's attention to his client's needs and personal involvement in every project are the keys to his long-time success.

"So many architects give their personal

attention until a project is done then you don't see them anymore," he says. "Bob continues to give me his personal attention right to now."

Kubicek is not modest about the service he provides to his customers. "We have a lot of good, loyal clients that keep coming back to us because we do a good job for them," he says. "We understand their needs and we meet them."

Kubicek began his career at an architectural firm in Ohio and then came to Phoenix in the early '70s to work for Haver, Nunn & Nelson. He spent a year in their Guam office, then served as head of production in Phoenix, and by 1974, he had passed his architectural boards for certification.

"They were a well known architectural firm," says Kubicek. "I went in and told them, 'I'm trained and skilled. I know I'm not going to be a partner tomorrow, but what's the future?' I was told, 'In 15 years you might be part of the firm.' I wasn't going to wait 15 years."

So Kubicek opened his own office in 1974 and called it Architects West. In 1976, Walt Nelson joined Kubicek. The two worked together for many years before Nelson retired in 1989.

"In 1974 I did anything that came in the door including small commercial and industrial projects and little bit of office," says Kubicek. "With Walt Nelson, we sat down and decided to become a specialist. We looked at what would be the least competitive arena, and, at that time, it was the grocery store area. I had grocery background from my grandfather, who owned grocery stores. It was something I understood, and I decided it was something I could go after. So we began directing our efforts towards retail. We got smaller retailers first, then eventually we got some big grocery stores."

Kubicek has come a long way since then. He maintains an impressive client list including Safeway, ABCO, Smith's Food



From left: Lee Hanley, president of Vestar Development Co., Timothy Amrhein of RKAA and David Larcher, vice president of Vestar.

King, Bashas, Albertsons, Smitty's and Food 4 Less. "We've worked for every grocer now in town," he says. "My company president, Bruce Bosley has been instrumental in this arena." Kubicek continues to work retail, seeing it as a good niche for current and future project potential.

RKAA also has many national clients including J.C. Penney, K-Mart, Montgomery Wards, Sears, Walgreen's Drugstores, L.A. Fitness, United Artists Theatre Circuit, Boston Market and Burger King.

Kubicek and his staff are licensed in most states west of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio River. The team, whose skill level is unsurpassed in many industries, has also found success with projects in the correctional, industrial and educational fields. RKAA is currently designing county jails throughout the west, and on the other end of the spectrum, designing numerous private Christian schools all over the nation.

RKAA is also designing "La Mirada," a 75,000-square-foot office and retail specialty center located on the northeast corner of Pima and Pinnacle Peak Roads in Scottsdale. According to Project Designer David Cardenas, the external sources of the project go back to early Arizona, which make the lines, shapes and colors natural to our desert. "When you enter the project, the internal colors and materials celebrate the spring desert floral palette and stir the imagination and emotions," he says. "The sun washed promenades and central fountain radiate welcome and invitation."

"Our hallmark project is RogersDale, U.S.A., a 74-acre themed commercial development in Victorville, California, for Roy Rogers and Dale Evans," says Harvey Unti, vice president and general manager of RKAA.

The development will contain such highlights as Western Street, a turn-of-the-century frontier town that represents the pioneer spirit of the early west with restaurants, entertainment venues, art

Center court promenade at La Mirada.



galleries, and Western apparel shops. Visitors will stroll through the Early California Plaza filled with decorative fountains and robust architecture reminiscent of a Spanish Mission. And the '50s Street will feature the Film Festival Cinema, a '50s diner, the Route 66 Museum, fashion boutiques and nostalgia shops.

The project is expected to be completed by the fall of 1997 and serve millions of people annually.

"We wanted to do something that reflected mom and dad's life," says Roy "Dusty" Rogers, Jr., son of Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. "So we themed what we wanted to do and it evolved from that. It's a very exciting project."

Rogers says Unti and his staff created conceptual drawings of the park, which Rogers' project management team liked. His parents are equally excited about the project. "Dad is 84 and mom is 83, and they're doing pretty good," he says. "They're very excited about the project. Dad tells me, 'Hurry up son, I ain't getting any younger.' So we're moving."

Unti adds, "Our Las Vegas office is scheduled to begin designing Diamond Belle's Hotel Casino." The \$75 million hotel, RV resort, and golf course will be located on 98 acres in Las Vegas, Nevada, eventually featuring 690 rooms, 385 RV spaces, 14,000 square feet of retail shops, and 48 homes sites.

Throughout the years, from the smallest to the largest projects, Kubicek and his staff live by the adage, "Some things get better with age." That's true if those things are carefully tended to. A fine wine deepens with age only if it is cared for. For any company celebrating 20 years in business, it takes a certain long-term vision coupled with dedicated tenacity, and, above all, harmonious flexibility to last the test of time. For those firms, and there have been many, who have been unable to grasp technological change and undertake new ideas, the future comes too soon.

"Computers are becoming a prominent factor in what is being done in architecture today, which is good and bad," says Kubicek. "The computer is so exacting and precise that some of the art and



Harvey Unti, vice president and general manager with Roy Rogers.

flair is being lost. However, it's production value is immense."

Kubicek adds, "Architecture was a fine oil painting. With today's technology, it's now a photograph, and technology is here to stay."

Despite some of the drawbacks, progressive architectural firms like Robert Kubicek Architects realize that technology is now, and those firms that want to stay in business will have to embrace the future. But they can do so without sacrificing design elegance.

"Currently, Robert Kubicek Architects operates 42 stations using both AutoCAD Version 12 and Intergraph software," says Timothy Amrhein, director of business development for Kubicek Architects. "Technology such as computer-aided design and other software



Western Street at RogersDale, U.S.A.



ROGERSDALE, U.S.A.
VICTORVILLE, CALIFORNIA

innovations means doing the same amount of work with less personnel. Clients want their work twice as fast, and the old school doesn't like using computers as a design tool. Newer architects have recognized that technology does have its place in design, but there will always be the need for the pencil and paper. Good firms will utilize both, as we do."

Despite the challenges facing the architectural industry over the next few years, Kubicek will keep leading his company forward and taking everything in successful stride.

"We all fight change, and it's something we worry about," he says. "But we have embraced it, and the future looks good."

It is this enthusiasm and flexibility of the staff, their dedication to the work and a sense of excellence in their design mission that has led Robert Kubicek Architects and Associates through 20 years of business success.

