

# THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

## CORPORATE GIVING: ANF ARCHITECTS

*By Richard J. Alley  
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The Levitt Shell at Overton Park, a free outdoor venue hosting live music shows, concluded its second spring season with nearly double its fall attendance.

“The season was great,” said Anne Pitts, Levitt Shell executive director, citing attendance figures of 34,000, up from the fall season numbers of 20,000.

The Shell’s Web site says its mission is to “build community through music and education, finding common ground for a diverse audience.” Pitts says much of the credit for the Shell’s success at meeting its goals should go to Askew Nixon Ferguson Architects.

The architecture firm is responsible for donating \$65,000 worth of renovation work prior to the venue’s grand opening in spring of 2008.

“Askew Nixon Ferguson went over and above what they signed on for,” said Levitt Shell board president Barry Lichterman. “We’re ecstatic with the work they did.”

“We created what’s there today,” said Lee Askew III. “It took much more time than anyone ever anticipated.”

But the benefits, according to Askew, “are absolutely immeasurable, the way it brings people from all over our city, all walks of life together. They feel good about Memphis and their community.”

The architecture firm is currently working on the renovation of the old customs house on Front Street into the new University of Memphis Law School, as well as additions to the FedEx hub.

Because of its work on the Levitt Shell, the firm has been tapped to design a new outdoor theater for the Tennessee Shakespeare Company in Germantown. Part of the work will be donated, and part will be done at a lowered rate.

Lee Askew says the renovation of the Shell was done using methods that were “green,” with as much material such as concrete and wood benches being reused as possible.

Pitts credits the architects’ Shell renovation with inspiring a revival of Overton Park.

“There had gotten to be a little bit of a blight on Overton Park, and the park has such wonderful things for families,” she said. “What Askew Nixon Ferguson did -- the renovation, the look, the clean lines and open lawn -- it feels safe and family friendly. It’s updated and just fits so

well into Overton Park.”

The architects’ office building at 1500 Union is almost as well known as some of the firm’s projects. The space is a popular sight for receptions, art shows and parties for charities such as the International Children’s Heart Foundation, Memphis Humane Society and St. Peter’s Manor.

“The office is a center of community itself,” Askew said.

The Levitt project became a labor of love for the architects, especially Askew, who said, “I hope the Shell will inspire others to do work like this. It’s just good for the community.”



Attendance at spring concerts this year was nearly double its fall attendance -- rising from about 20,000 to about 34,000. “The season was great,” said Anne Pitts, Levitt Shell executive director.