

Architectural institutions to merge

By Amos Maki
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Williamson Pounders Architects and Askew Nixon Ferguson Architects -- longtime powerhouses in the local architectural community -- are merging.

James F. Williamson and Louis R. Pounders, principals of Williamson Pounders Architects, are joining Askew Nixon Ferguson Architects, the 30-year-old firm that specializes in education, hospitality, commercial and industrial design.

"The addition of Louis and Jim to our design team will infuse new energy into our office and allow us to take on new and challenging building types," said Lee Askew III, partner and founder of ANF. "We are especially excited about the depth of experience and strong client base that they bring to our firm."

Williamson is known for the award-winning designs of Ballet Memphis, and restoration of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and the Orpheum theater.

"We've known each other for a long time and always felt the two firms we were compatible," said Williamson. "We often found ourselves competing with each other, so we thought maybe it would make sense for us to stop competing and help each other."

Pounders is known for his work on the Tunica RiverPark, Lichterman Nature Center and Metropolitan Interfaith Association headquarters. He was also the designer for the first seven Wonders exhibits and recently completed the new Cotton Exchange Museum inside the Cotton Exchange building Downtown.

"I think what it does is enhance the capabilities of the new firm to pursue the art of architecture in a way that we haven't been able to do individually," Pounders said. "I think this will give us the opportunity to proceed in ways we just weren't able to do before."

Frank Ricks, a principal with Looney Ricks Kiss, said the merger creates a powerhouse architectural firm. "You've got two firms who have been around a long time and principals who have been involved in the city for a long time," Ricks said. "I think it makes for a powerful composition."

Williamson said that while some members of Williamson Pounders Architects would probably join the ANF team, it's too early to tell exactly how many will be making the move.

"That's all under discussion, so we're not quite sure yet," he said.

Williamson Pounders and Askew Nixon Ferguson principals all emphasized the compatibility of the firms' office cultures as being an important part of the deal.

"Our workplace cultures are similar, and it makes sense to come together," said William "Bert" Ferguson, senior partner at ANF. "We believe excellent design is the bedrock of architecture and by joining forces we will continue to strengthen our talents."