

# SUCCESSFUL SUCCESSION

## FIRM-OWNER-TURNED-FIRM-CONSULTANT CONTINUES TO LEAD THE WAY

**Zurich Esposito:** Your firm's ownership structure has changed, and it appears to be a successful succession. Will you describe your present role at Searl Lamaster Howe Architects (SLHA)?

**Linda Searl, FAIA:** The Searl Lamaster Howe partnership was formed in 2007, after working with Pam Lamaster and Greg Howe for several years at my firm, previously called Searl and Associates. After owning a majority of the partnership, I sold my shares and became a consultant in 2015. Today, I work part time in the office on projects and with clients I've had for many years, and I have time to do other things I like outside the office as well.

**ZE:** How long had you worked with Pam Lamaster and Greg Howe before they became partners?

**LS:** Almost 10 years. Their process of becoming owners in the firm felt very organic and natural; both Pam and Greg came to the firm fairly early in their careers. This has always been a firm where young people could grow, working on projects with the client from the very beginning until the very end, getting a good sense of the whole process. It was a gradual process that led them to becoming owners of the firm. And they are great at it.

**ZE:** What in your own career led you to start your own firm?

**LS:** After graduating, I taught at two universities for several years until I realized I needed to practice architecture, or I wouldn't be a good teacher. I moved, without a job, to Chicago. I had met Jack Hartray, and he invited me to Nagle Hartray Associates for lunch, during which he advised me to interview with several firms. I was in the process of doing just that when I got a call from his firm a week later with a job offer. I was with his firm for five years. Jack was my mentor and practically my PhD in architectural detailing. I realized, though, that it would be unlikely for me to ever be a partner in the firm in the foreseeable future.

**ZE:** That's when you went out on your own?

**LS:** Not quite. A mutual friend had told me that Kathy Quinn [Kathryn Quinn, FAIA] was planning to start her own office, suggesting I might be her partner. It wasn't long before we formed Quinn and Searl Architects, in 1985. After five years, we realized we were so much alike, each really a design person — not necessarily what you need in an effective partnership — so we split. I formed Searl and Associates in 1990.

**ZE:** In addition to leading firms, you've served on the city of



AIA Chicago's Zurich Esposito with Linda Searl, FAIA, at the River North offices of Searl Lamaster Howe Architects (SLHA), owned today by Pam Lamaster, AIA, and Greg Howe, AIA.

Chicago's Plan Commission since 1997 and as its chair for many of those years. Can you describe the Plan Commission's role and function?

**LS:** The Plan Commission was formed initially in 1909 to promote the Plan of Chicago. Today, we adopt plans developed by the planning department and review proposed planned developments, as well as lakefront and park district projects.

**ZE:** What happens after a project is presented to a commission?

**LS:** There is an open question period, then the alderman can speak and announce whether he or she is in favor of the project. A recommendation is made following a public comment

period. It's through that public comment portion that a lot of issues come to the surface. For example, the awareness of the importance of diversity in projects has become clear: The Commission became increasingly aware that large-project developers were only accountable for minority participation during design and development if the project was city-funded, of which most projects are not. Today — in order to get the certificate of occupancy — developers seeking planned-development zoning approvals are required to report minority and women hiring efforts and actual hiring data throughout the project cycle. Being involved in the development of these kinds of initiatives and processes that impact the way our cities are built is great work to have. **CA**