

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA  
**SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE FOUNDATION**



**ANNUAL REPORT 2013 – 2014**

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Honoring a Rich Legacy, a Robust Present, and a Promising Future  
Gifts and Grants at the U.Va. School of Architecture

## PROFILES IN GIVING

### Susan Williamson Ross (BSArch '83) and Clark Construction Group LLC

From the time that Susan Williamson Ross was a little girl, she knew she wanted to be an architect, "When other kids were playing house, or playing doctor – I would sit my brother and sister down and ask them what they wanted their dream house to look like." She took all of the architectural drafting classes offered at her high school. When her uncle, a builder of high-end homes in Georgetown, gave her his old wooden drafting materials, which she still has to this day – Susan's path was set.

Susan was ready to go to Cornell's School of Architecture on scholarship. At the last minute she decided that she did not want to attend a 5-year architecture program and enrolled into the 4+2 program at the U.Va. School of Architecture. "I went to U.Va. for the richness and diversity of not only the architecture program but the whole University. I wanted to be able to take classes outside of design and learn everything I could." Susan never regretted her decision, "I loved the small scale of the A-School. I knew everyone and all the faculty knew me – they invited you to their homes for dinner. U.Va. taught me to problem solve. It taught me to be strong because nothing toughens a 19-year old more than having to stand up in front of your peers after a sleepless night, and defend your ideas."

Susan graduated in 1983 into a bad economy. Dean Joe Bosserman called William P. Lecky, FAIA (BArch '60) and got Susan an interview. Bill was the Architect-of-Record for the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington DC, and Su-

san worked on the project for a year. She went on to work with Ted Mariani at Mariani Architects Engineers, attended graduate architecture school at Catholic University, passed her licensing exams and then decided to take a year to "do something else." She found a job with Clark Construction (then Omni Construction) as an assistant project manager and 27 years later is the Executive Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer.

"I love the built environment but after several years of practicing architecture, I slowly realized that as a young architect, I was not doing much design and that it might be a long time before I would have the opportunity to do so. I like the variety of people I get to work within the construction industry - contractors, builders, owners, architects - trying to get them to all work together on our time schedule. I still get to use the problem solving skills I learned at the A-School but no longer for the design but rather the business of building."

Clark Construction Group is a major employer of U.Va. students, not just from the A-School but from the Engineering, College, and Commerce Schools. The corporate offices in their Bethesda headquarters are full of U.Va. alumni who all believe strongly in giving back to the University and to the students. Susan has helped foster a strong relationship between Clark and the A-School over many years - funding annual Clark undergraduate student scholarships, capital improvements during the Campbell Hall renovations, and the Clark-Howe Colloquium, a series of lectures and guest speakers to teach students about key issues in the design and construction of contemporary infrastructure, in honor of Professor Joe Howe. This year Clark sponsored the 26th annual Dean's Forum Dinner. On top of their generous donations, Clark regularly hosts students for externships during the January term and continues to recruit the brightest students, "I would hire almost any U.Va. undergraduate who is passionate about building and serious about construction. The students are very well-rounded with great people skills and intellectually talented, not just book smart but able to jump in and get things done."

When Paul Weinschenk, now Chair of the School of Architecture Foundation Board of Trustees, reached out to Susan in 2011 to join the Foundation Board, Susan knew it was the right moment in her life to dedicate more time to the A-School. "My education and experiences at U.Va. provided me the foundation for success in all aspects of my life. My middle son is a 4th year at the Commerce School and it is a pleasure to see that the tradition of excellence continues at the University. I am delighted to give back in any way I can to ensure the lasting legacy of such a great place."



## PROFILES IN GIVING

### David Haresign (BSArch '76)

**Tell us about your background and how you wound up at the A-School.**

I grew up in what was at the time rural Virginia, 15 miles west of Washington, DC. My dad was a communications engineer with the telephone company responsible for infrastructure for both Dulles Airport, and the new town Reston, VA. While both were under construction, he would take me to the sites. It was my first introduction to planning and architecture. We also built things at home – finishing rooms in our new house and making furniture. By the age of 13, I was sure I wanted to be an architect or an urban planner. I initially enrolled at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in upstate New York; I loved architecture and the design studio, but not the frigid New York climate nor the engineering and science focus of the school. I transferred into the U.Va. School of Architecture for its rich traditions, great faculty, and energy in the design studio.

**What came next?**

I spent two years and three summers immersed in the A-School curriculum; participating in the Student Union, booking music for and working at Pavilion XI (a student bar), making lifelong friends, and playing sports -intramural basketball, boxing, running and biking. It was one of the most intense growth periods of my life. After graduation, I worked as a laborer in a small commercial construction firm to gain greater appreciation of the role of the architect in the construction process. From there I started practicing architecture, became partner in several large firms, and finally joined Bill Bonstra, FAIA to form Bonstra | Haresign ARCHITECTS in 2004.

**What aspects of your education within the School of Architecture do you appreciate the most?**

I was exposed to a wide range of topics at the School, all of which were rooted in a deep appreciation for the past and what we, as architects, can learn from it. I developed



a greater appreciation of the value of hard work and leadership. The School taught me how to think about problem solving – a systematic approach to integrating art and technology into projects that I still use today. But most importantly, it strengthened my belief that I could impact people's lives with smart planning and buildings.

**You are very active with the DC A-School alumni – helping with events, hosting externs, getting students involved in competitions in DC – what is the importance of keeping an A-School alumni community outside of Charlottesville?**

We have shared experiences starting with our education at a truly special university. When alumni gather, we continue to learn from each other as we share ideas, and built networks. Alumni are representatives of what the future holds for students and I have engaged in many great conversations about the importance of professional practice at the School. I applaud Dean Meyer's intent on strengthening connections to firms and alumni, and to continuing the good work that is already underway.

Like many of our alumni, I am very proud of the school. Our faculty and students do extremely well in our AIA|DC competitions, affirming how valuable lessons currently taught are received by independent jurors. U.Va. builds upon its strong reputation by showing well in competitive awards, and sending out our talented graduates to be successful in the professional community.

**What are your hopes for the future A-School students who will benefit from the David T. and Patricia L. Haresign Endowed Scholarship Fund?**

I came from modest means and missed a few opportunities, like the Vicenza program, because I needed to work to help cover personal expenses. I hope that our gift will make it possible for deserving students to take advantage of as many learning experiences – academic and otherwise – that I was able to, as well as new opportunities available to them. My time and lessons learned at the University are the primary reason that I have enjoyed a good career, and I am grateful. While we make annual donations to the school, a planned gift gave us the opportunity to dedicate a larger sum to support future generations of architects.

*David Haresign, FAIA, is a partner at Bonstra | Haresign ARCHITECTS, in Washington, DC, a 30 person award-winning firm specializing in urban work, commercial, mixed use, multi-family residential, and institutional projects. David is past President of AIA|DC, and is a critic and lecturer at local universities.*



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