

Respected Butler architect dies

Rittelmann, 76, oversaw BHKR expansion

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Known as an innovator and dedicated giver, Butler architect P. Richard “Dick” Rittelmann, 76, died Sunday.

Rittelmann, who retired as chairman of Burt Hill Kosar Rittelmann Associates in 2006, had overseen its expansion from an office of a dozen people to an international firm of more than 1,200 architects and engineers with 10 domestic and three foreign offices.

“He was the biggest intellectual I’ve ever met ... He was brilliant,” said Tom Demko, managing principal Stantec Butler, which had acquired BHKR after Rittelmann’s retirement.

“There’s three things you have to note about Dick: His fearlessness, his constant strive for innovation and his understanding to constantly change and evolve to be the future not the past. Ahead of his time and loving it.

“His pioneer nature took us from a general practice to a specialty firm in laboratory, health care, sciences and technology.”

Rittelmann, a 1956 graduate of Butler High School, attended Rensselaer Polytechnic University. After graduating from Rensselaer in 1961 with a degree in architecture, he was an officer in the U.S. Navy until 1964.

He then joined the small architectural firm of Howard, Burt & Hill in 1967 and became a partner in the firm a decade later.

John Kosar, who was a principal at Burt Hill Kosar Rittelmann, said in a booklet produced by Stantec about Rittelmann that he “is the most intelligent person I know. He is a talented architect with incredible engineering knowledge.

“A friend, mentor, leader, teacher, visionary and a long list of other attributes have made Dick a special, unforgettable contributor to all of us, to the architectural and engineering community and society.

“We appreciate Dick’s pioneering of energy conservation and alternative energy in the 70s that

put our firm on the map. He started our engineering component and created one of the first firms to have in-house engineering.

“He was internationally recognized for this unique talent and knowledge at that time.”

Lisa Konesni, secretary for the Golden Tornado Scholastic Foundation, said, “He was a stellar community member.”

In addition to being a foundation board member, Rittelmann and his wife, Jane, were founders of the FAB (Fine Arts and Beyond) Showcase, an annual show that highlights the students of the Butler School District in the arts in such areas as photography, sculpture and ceramics.

“They got it off the ground just beautifully,” Konesni said. “He believed in education and was an artist himself. There wasn't much he didn't know about.”

Nationally, he had been chairman of the research advisory board for Oak Ridge National Laboratory and was a member of the board for Rensselaer Polytechnic University.

He also was on the board of the Visiting Nurses Association of Western PA.

A gallery in the Butler Arts Center on Main Street is named for the Rittelmans.

At **Butler County Community College**, he'd been a member of the trustees since July 2008.

From 2010 to 2014, Rittelmann was an adjunct professor in the college's architecture program.

He team taught with now-retired architecture professor Joe Vaughan.

“We were able to have a pretty solid program with Rittelmann and Alva Hill (team teaching). It was a wonderful program,” Vaughan said.

Rittelmann was a “brilliant man who made a real effort to get that information to a level where freshman or sophomore students could understand it. And he brought in a lot of real world examples.”

Vaughn said, “The students really liked him and respected him.”

BC3 President Nicholas C. Neupauer said, “Dick was incredibly supportive. The architecture is without question, but also he was supportive with collective bargaining, strategic planning and benchmarking. He offered so much depth in so many areas ... This is a tremendous loss.”