



JASON MCGEE

Senior Project Manager

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Symbiotic Relationships: KDG's Investment in Commercial Architecture Comes Full Circle

Jason McGee always knew he wanted to become an architect.

From his early days in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, staying up past his bedtime trying to make his Lego model to perfection, to his career aptitude surveys in high school that repeatedly ranked architecture as his top fit — all of the signs seemed to lead McGee toward architecture.

“It was almost like there wasn't another option,” said McGee. “When it came time to declare a career field, I knew that architecture was the route for me.”

A Confirming Opportunity

When a guest speaker visited McGee's sophomore geometry class to announce a new [Architecture & Construction Management \(ACM\) Satellite Program](#), it didn't take convincing to get McGee on board.

“I distinctly remember my ears perking up during that announcement,” said McGee. “The next period was lunch, and as I sat there eating, I knew without a doubt I wanted to do it.”

To McGee's dismay, when he told his parents about the two-year program offered by [Eastland-Fairfield Career and Technical Schools in Gahanna](#), his mom remarked that he would never go to the career center because it was for people who didn't like school. But with a little convincing and clarification, McGee applied for the program and jumped in head-first his junior year.

Each day, McGee drove to Gahanna, where he sat with students from around the region and gleaned practical skills and advice from instructor [Dan Keiser](#), the principal architect at Kesier Design Group. “It pretty quickly confirmed my interest in commercial architecture,” said McGee. “I remember walking into class one day, thinking how awesome it was. I couldn't wait to do it all day and get paid for it someday.”

McGee's first project in the program was drawing a bridge.

“It blew my mind that I was drawing something that was going to be built,” said McGee. “And now, that's what we do all day.”

A Chance to Teach

For his undergraduate studies, McGee looked no further than down the street from his childhood home. [The Ohio State University](#) was an affordable option with a solid architecture program. While at OSU, McGee interned for a large architectural firm. He worked there full-time before heading to the [Pratt Institute](#) to earn a Master of Architecture.

Throughout his college studies, McGee stayed in touch with Keiser. He visited the architecture program periodically and shared about his experiences in the field as well as his hopes for the future.

“One day, I made a tongue-in-cheek comment to the high schoolers that I would come back and teach the program after Dan quit,” said McGee. “It was such a unique opportunity, I never thought it would actually happen.”

After McGee completed graduate school, he was ready to take the field by storm. But the year was 2008, and the nation was dealing with the worst recession since the Great Depression. McGee received his long-awaited diploma, but he struggled to find job openings in residential architecture or commercial architecture.

In the midst of his search, a friend told him about an opportunity to teach design at a high school in Durham, North Carolina. Although he never saw himself as a full-time teacher, he taught there for five years before he found out the instructor of the ACM program was leaving. He immediately jumped at the opportunity to give back to the program that set him up for success.

“I felt like the caretaker of something of great value,” McGee said of taking over the program. “I knew it was a greater responsibility because I had a connection to the program and wanted to afford those same opportunities I had received to other students. I wanted to leave the program better than I found it.”

Keiser, who was the chair of the advising committee, met with McGee shortly after he took the job to give him advice and answer any questions he had about the program. Over the next six and a half years that McGee directed the program, he would seek counsel from Keiser; his once high school architecture instructor was now a trusted mentor and friend.

A Commitment to the Future of Commercial Architecture

McGee will tell you that the best part of teaching is always working with the students.

“When you see them light up and connect ideas — that is the best part,” said McGee. “You might have to push them a lot at the start, but they’ll gain momentum and begin to make a lot of progress in a short amount of time.”

After teaching for 13 years, McGee had an itch to get back into the field himself. While he loved teaching, he was ready to return to the same exhilaration he felt when he first discovered the field — taking drawings through the process of becoming buildings.

McGee has been back in commercial architecture for two years, but he remains deeply connected to the program that launched his career. McGee sits on the program’s advisory committee, serves as a mentor for the senior capstone project, and advises the current teacher of the program, seeking to give her the same support that Keiser gave to him.

Keiser Design Group now sends three of its employees to mentor young architects through ACM, and many of its current employees are graduates of the program.

“There is a symbiotic relationship between KDG and ACM,” said McGee. “We give our time to the program to invest in the future of the industry, but we also make solid connections with students that fit well in our office as employees.”

It’s a win-win — and that’s what relationships are all about.

Learn more about KDG’s approach to service based architecture at keiserdesigngroup.com/about/.