

Architect takes the reins at school he designed

BY GEORGE KORDA
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Don Shell will feel a father's pride when he assumes the mantle of Principal for a Day at Farragut Middle School. He gave birth to the place, so to speak, from floor to ceiling, wall to wall, gym to library, classrooms to offices.

Shell oversaw design of the Farragut Intermediate and Middle school campus. With over 250,000 square feet under one roof and a capacity of nearly 3,000 students, the campus is one of the largest in the country even by today's standards. Shell, CEO of Community Tectonics Architects, designed the original buildings in 1984 and followed with the additions in 1990. Farragut Middle School won a 1986 AIA Design Citation, the 1985 TSBA School of the Year and the 1991 TSBA Award of Merit for school additions.

"That's one of my babies," he said, referring to Farragut Middle School. "Of course, we've had a lot of them, but this is the only one I've ever been able to come back to and run for a day."

Community Tectonics Architects has designed more than 600 schools in its 40-year history.

Shell said the school came together particularly well because we utilized a participatory programming and design process which involved all the users. The ideas of the administration, including principal at the time, Dr. Donald Rhoades and the entire teaching staff were incorporated in the design.

When it was completed, the school was among the most advanced in the state, incorporating small learning communities through use of a "pod" design, he said.



"We worked with TVA, exploring new ideas on energy efficiency. The school is built with a southern exposure, allowing daylight into all of the classrooms. There are light shelves that disallow glare, HVAC with lighting controls, and earth berming"

Winning the AIA Design Citation Award for Farragut Middle School made the design work particularly rewarding, he said. "When you're matched up against your peers throughout the state, and the school you've designed takes a national award and two state awards, it's a distinction of which you're very proud," He said.

Community Tectonics Architects in the last 5 years has won 16 awards, including 9 School of the Year awards, more than any other Tennessee architectural firm. Shell was also a principal architect in the design of the Sunsphere, which has become the symbol of Knoxville since the 1982 World's Fair.

Shell said he plans to play a little hooky, if he can get away with it, when he is principal for a day.

"I want to help Principal Richard Dalhaus any way I can or am supposed to," Shell said. "At the same time, I'm going to try to sneak away and get a look at the whole building. It's like seeing your child when he or she is all grown up.

"You're awfully proud, but a little wistful at the same time," Shell added, "because you realize how much time has passed since it was a little baby. Or in this case, since the first drawings were made.