

Veteran architects combine fledgling firms to speed growth

BY TIM SCHOOLEY

Two leading local architects have joined forces to create one larger firm.

Dennis Astorino and Chris Haupt, who worked together for 10 years on such major local projects as PNC Park and PNC First-side Center, have combined their respective fledgling firms, creating a new, larger 15-person firm they expect will be able to pursue larger projects here, nationwide and internationally.

The deal was structured as an acquisition in which Dennis L. Astorino Architecture and Interior Design has bought Haupt Group LLC.



Chris Haupt



Dennis Astorino

It's a move that allowed Astorino's more established Green Tree firm to bring in the energy and expertise of Haupt, and Haupt, who has been operating as a solo practitioner, to access the resources of an established firm without going through the cost of hiring support staff and setting up an office on his own.

"Chris was doing extremely well with his ability to bring in some work, but he needed some staff to help him," Astorino said.

"We kind of went through all those growing pains."

The decision to merge developed from working jointly on projects together with their respective young firms.

"The fact that Dennis and I had been partnering on projects gave me a lot of comfort that we could continue that together," Haupt said.

"We share the same values. We share the same vision."

Astorino went off on his own three-and-a-half years ago after leaving as a principal of his brother Lou's long-established, same-named firm, Astorino, which ranks among the region's largest.

Haupt, also a former Astorino executive, launched Haupt Group in late 2010 after deciding to leave the former L. Robert Kimball, where he was at one time a managing principal, once that firm was acquired by Philadelphia-based CDI Corp.

With the acquisition, Dennis L. Astorino Architecture and Interior Design is acquiring Haupt's established client contracts in a deal that will give Haupt an ownership stake in the new, larger firm.

That includes a Haupt Group project that entailed managing the architecture services for a \$65 million sports facility project for a major university.

No further terms of the deal were disclosed.

Haupt said he hopes establishing his practice within the larger firm of Dennis L. Astorino will enable them to better pursue larger sports facility projects nationwide as part of a practice that offers architectural design, strategic and master planning, and interior design among its service lines.

Along with its acquisition of Haupt Group, Dennis L. Astorino Architecture and Interior Design also has named a number of its established architectural staff as owners and principals, including Joseph M. Sepcic, AIA, Nick Doichev, AIA, and Jennifer M. Pavlik, NCIDQ.

Astorino's firm has been growing briskly during its short time in business. Astorino estimated it has tripled in size since it started in an economic environment that has hit the construction and architecture fields hard.

Working with such established clients as Burns & Scalo Real Estate Services and the Buncher Co., for which the firm has developed a master plan for the company's large assembly of empty land in the Strip District, Astorino said the move will require some expanded office space and could result in more hiring.

The firm now counts seven registered architects on staff, Astorino said.

Anne Swager, executive director of the Pittsburgh chapter of the American Institute of Architects, said the merger makes a lot of sense since the principals

involved know each other well and have proven themselves to each other in past projects.

She said the move allows both firms to establish the kind of scale needed to chase larger jobs.

"It makes sense to partner up with people you already know to build yourself," Swager said.

"If you're going to do large projects, you're going to need to have a lot of people to work with."

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