

Craftsmanship Awards Valued as Unique Piece of BX History

BX of Central Ohio Celebrates 125th Anniversary

It was a simple note in the 1964 Builders Exchange annual report from Board President Art Hess (Garwick & Ross, Inc.).

“In order to encourage good workmanship in the building industry, the Exchange added to its list of Honors and Awards, starting this year, 1964, a group of annual ‘Craftsmanship Awards’ for excellence in workmanship. The recipients of these awards will be chosen by an impartial committee of local architects, engineers, etc., and the award will be made after the dinner of the 1965 Construction Conference.”

Thus launched a program that quickly became a favorite among BX members. The Craftsmanship Award winners’ work – featured with them at the Exchange annual meeting – is always inspiring and often astonishing. Recipients have been compared to a sports All-Star roster, because they reflect the wide range of specialties in construction.

Although not every “position” (or in this case, trade) must have a Craftsmanship winner each year, the BX awards consistently recognize the many, diverse talents that are essential in the industry. Through the decades, honorees have included carpenters, painters, roofers, sprinkler fitters, excavators, plumbers, sheet metal workers, plasterers, electricians, glaziers, ironworkers, masons, drywall installers, cabinetmakers, concrete finishers, pipefitters and more!

And like All-Star players, many Craftsmanship Award winners are repeat selections: known as the “best of the best” in their fields.

As the Builders Exchange of Central Ohio marks its 125th anniversary in 2017, the organization’s Craftsmanship Awards hold a special place in its history.

AIA, OSPE provided judges in 1960s and 70s

Ironically, as valued as the Craftsmanship Awards have been, BX records of most early winners are lost. A photograph of the first recipients found in Exchange files has no identities of the individuals, their companies or their winning work.

But the happiness of that moment, and the pride of the craftsmen and their employers in the picture, is clear. A new tradition had begun.



The first-ever recipients of the 1965 BX Craftsmanship Award were honored at the dinner of the 1965 Construction Conference at the Athletic Club of Columbus. They posed with their employers, who also received certificates. Unfortunately, the names of these inaugural award winners have been lost – the Builders Exchange welcomes any information members may have about them in their historic files. Four of the employers identified were J.T. Edwards, Jr. (J.T. Edwards Co.) front row, third from right, and Dick Ziska (Myron Cornish Co. of Columbus), Sam Shuman (Julian Speer Co.) and Parker Garwick (Garwick & Ross, Inc.), fourth, fifth and sixth from left in the second row.



The 1970 Craftsmanship Award judging committee included, seated from left, Stuart P. Jackson, P.E. (Jackson Associates), John W. Gardner (D.E. Gardner Co.), chair, and Holbrook H. Clay, P.E. (City of Columbus Division of Streets); and standing from left, Clyde Gosnell, Jr. (Karlsberger & Associates Architects), James P. Swiatek (Swiatek & Grutsch Architects), John L. Eberts (Eberts & Stoerckel Architects) and Ernest C. Marmet, P.E. (retired).

As described in 1964, judges during the first two decades of the program were area design professionals, appointed by the local chapters of the American Institute of Architects and the Ohio Society of Professional Engineers. A BX board member chaired the judging committee.

By the 1980s, contractors from the BX membership were added to the selections group, for whom judging was a time-consuming yet enjoyable commitment. Judges visited each project for which a craftsman was nominated, often getting behind-the-scenes access and a close-up look at the most beautiful and complex construction work done in central Ohio over the past year.

Today, the committee still consists of an equal mix of architects, engineers and contractors. But since the BX roster now includes all these professions, judges are recruited from the membership.

Skill and commitment, regardless of size

Not only have nominees always been from a wide range of trades, they also work on all sizes of projects. For example, the 14 winners for 1968, announced in the February 15, 1969 edition of *The Columbus Citizen-Journal*, included Phillip J. Kelly (Columbus Heating & Ventilating Co.) for the heat treating area exhaust system at the Timken Roller Bearing Plant and Richard Helsel (Altman-Coady Co.) for the fireplace, walnut paneling, shelving and mantel work at Huntington National Bank in Worthington.

Large or small, the work of BX Craftsmanship Award winners continues to be a fascinating historic record of the exceptional quality found in central Ohio buildings. More meaningful to the BX membership are the human beings behind the work, which is why the award has always focused on people instead of projects.



Craftsmanship Award winner Bill Sharon (Mid-City Electric Co.), center, was honored in 1973 for electrical work at the new Holiday Inn on the Lane. Celebrating with him was a business agent from Electrical Workers Union 683, Danny Bricker, second from right, and Sharon's colleagues from Mid-City Electric, from left: Jim Dew, president; Tom Lindner, project estimator and George Edinger, manpower superintendent.

The late Terry O'Shaughnessy, who was BX executive director from 1978 to 1994, described Craftsmanship Award winners as those "who have elevated their trade to nearly an art form."

In a BX publication featuring the 1989 selections, O'Shaughnessy wrote, "those who have chosen this industry for their career understand all too well that the beauty of a design cannot become reality without the hands and eyes of the craftsman." He noted that it was the job of the Builders Exchange to not only salute exceptional craftsmen in the community, but to elevate them as industry role models.



The 16 Craftsmanship Award recipients in 1983 were, front row from left, Mike Smith and Bob Buhrts (M.S. Corna Co.), Jim Hopper (Kenny Huston Co.), Charles Mulholand (Capital Fire Protection Co.) and Pete Colussi (M.S. Corna Co.); second row from left, Ralph Heil (Wilson Floors Co.), Jeff Hunsaker (Porter Interior Surfaces), Jed Johnson (Architectural Artisans, Inc.), Tony Trott (Pymer Plastering) and Bruce Ohlinger (Superior Electric Co.); and third row from left, Tom Burke (Johns Co.), Bob Smith (M.S. Corna Co.), George Martina (Southwestern Tile & Marble Co.), David Snider (Porter Interior Surfaces), Willard Jakeway (Jakeway Masonry) and Del Hammond (Hammond Rubble Stone).

"We also hold them up to all the tradesmen in our industry and say, 'This is the standard you should strive for. This is the definition of the best you can be.'" That year, more than 100 individuals had been nominated for the award, with 18 selected.

Winning work reflects the city's evolution

Because the majority of work done by BX members since the 1950s has been commercial, so were most of the projects executed by Craftsmanship Award nominees. Some were new construction, some were renovation or restoration. A sampling of winners' work over the decades mirrors the growth of greater Columbus.



2005 BX Craftsmanship recipients are, from left: Charlie Griffith (Mid-City Electric Co.), Kevin Smuck (Hilliard Glass & Service), Unidentified Company Representative, Edwin Hirle (Dean's Custom Fixtures, Inc.), Thomas McAllister (The Ardit Co.), Steve Adams (Northstar Fire Protection, Inc.), Greg Stewart, company representative (The Superior Group), Kraig Coe (The Superior Group), Mark Callahan (GreenScapes Landscape Architects & Contractors), Marty Whelan (International Masonry, Inc.) and Troy Shurtz (Creative Cabinets, Ltd.).

Additional 1968 winners were selected for plastering the coffered ceiling in a new wing of Doctor's Hospital, for concrete form work at the Operation Center of City National Bank (later Banc One and now JPMorgan Chase), for stone work at the new St. Margaret of Cortona Church and for brick masonry at the new Westland Mall.

Two years later, craftsmen were honored for lathing and plastering renovations at the landmark Jai Lai restaurant, as well as for concrete work at the new Ohio Historical Society and steel erection at the new Franklin County jail downtown. In 1978, six winners had worked on the new Grange Mutual Insurance Co. building, with others recognized for masonry at Stygler Village in Gahanna and stone work at Franklin Commons.

Downtown landmarks were being born and re-born in the 1980s and BX Craftsmanship Award winners played a role in everything from park landscapes (the west bank concrete walkways in 1981) to historic restoration (ornamental plastering and painting in The Palace Theatre in 1981), to elaborate interior finishes (millwork at the Capital Square office building in 1986) to high-rise structural steel (Vern Riffe Center in 1987).

At the same time, exploding construction around Interstate 270 showcased the talent of BX craftsmen, who installed the heat exchanger lines in the new OCLC building (1981), the marble work at the Marriott Inn North (1982), the ceramic pavers at Metro Center office building IV (1983) and the precast panels at the Busch Corporate Center (1984).

The Ohio State University's buildings also benefitted from BX award winners, beginning in the 1960s – like the concrete work at “Academic Building No. 1” in 1968 – and picking up the pace in the 1990s and beyond. The brick, limestone and sandstone masonry at the Wexner Center for the Visual Arts and the chillers at Rhodes Hall Hospital (1990), brick masonry at the OSU Equine Center (1996), terrazzo flooring at Value City Arena (1999) and carpentry at the Ohio Stadium renovation (2000) are among dozens of campus projects completed by Craftsmanship Award winners.

Awards presented in various venues

From 1965 to 1987, the Craftsmanship Awards were presented at the dinner concluding the annual Construction Conference – which had evolved into the Central Ohio Construction Expo. By 1988, both programs were so large that BX leaders decided the Craftsmanship Awards merited a separate event.

The awards banquet was held that year at a location ideal for the tribute: the meticulously restored 1890s-era ballroom at The Great Southern Hotel. The Southern hosted most of the craftsmanship banquets in their stand-alone run from 1988 to 1996, attracting 200 to 250 guests each year. In 1997, the Exchange board made another change to the program to give it even greater visibility.

That year, the Craftsmanship Awards became a key piece of the program at the BX annual meeting, which was attracting nearly 800 attendees. The program combined several awards, including the Cornerstone Award and Safety Awards with the craftsmanship presentation, providing a well-rounded view of excellence in the industry.

Also in 1997, a woman received the Craftsmanship Award for the first time. Celeste T.M. Baker (The Sherman R. Smoot Co. of Ohio) was recognized for her masonry work at the Ohio Department of



The first and only woman to date to receive a Craftsmanship Award was Celeste Baker (Sherman R. Smoot Co. of Ohio), center, in 1997. Recognized for her masonry work at the Ohio Department of Agriculture Administration Building, Baker was among the first group of winners to receive their awards at the BX annual meeting. She was congratulated by Cathy Blackford, left, the first Exchange woman executive director and Andrea Pruneau (Dorsey Construction Co.), the first woman BX board member.

Agriculture Administration Building. Baker, who was a fifth-generation member of the construction industry, remains the only female recipient of the award.

Expanding recognition to outstanding crews

Although the BX Craftsmanship Awards were designed to salute the “human face” behind extraordinary construction work, in reality most commercial building projects are the effort of many “faces” – members of a crew. Most BX winners have had the support of teams of talented tradesmen, ranging in size from 1 to 100-plus. Their impact has been constantly acknowledged by both craftsmen and their employers over the years.

Program Chair John Kuempel (The Kuempel Co.) noted this fact in 1973, writing, “In these days of team construction, it has become extremely difficult to single out those tradesmen who, personally, executed the work.”

Apparently, this quandary was often discussed by program planners, who for a time in the 1970s changed the award format to include crew recognition. The only winners list in BX files from later that decade is the 1978 result – in which 28 individuals were selected for 12 projects. Eventually, and for reasons undocumented, the program shifted back to emphasizing one or two nominees “responsible for” the quality work on a specific project. The result was that nominees by default were often the crew foreman or project field leader, who may or may not have had much hands-on execution of the work.

Since the 1980s, the Exchange has published all the crew members’ names on each Craftsmanship Award winner’s project. But with the encouragement of judging committees in recent years, the BX board expanded the program in 2016 to recognize the impact of an entire crew on work which reflects “the best of the best” in commercial construction.

Last year, one individual and nine crews received the BX Craftsmanship Award for 10 projects in central Ohio. The pride they displayed in crossing the stage at the annual meeting reflected another comment made by O’Shaughnessy in his 1989 article:

“There are craftsmen in every trade... and craftsmanship in every tradesman. The industry will provide the opportunity; the individual must provide the desire.”



Among the one individual and nine crews receiving a 2016 BX Craftsmanship Award was the crew from Anderson Aluminum Corp. from left: Dustin Fox, Scott Smallwood, Eli Dickson, Jesse Fuller and Guy Johnson for their work on Nationwide Children’s Hospital.