

DMA Architects, PA

Local Architect Dreams BIG in Great Bend

When Don Marrs was a youngster living on a farm near Longford, Ks., he may not have realized he was sowing the seeds of his life-long career as an architect. Marrs was learning some basics of the trade by watching his grandfather, who was a carpenter and builder.

Marrs said this early education played a big role in his becoming the principal/owner of DMA Architects, P.A., which he started in 1981 at Salina. The Great Bend office is located at 1420 Roosevelt, which is the family home of his wife, Mona Guesnier Marrs.

“My grandfather repaired and built farm structures and constructed a church for the community,” Marrs said. “My father died in a truck accident when I was 13 months old so I spent a lot of time with my grandfather.” These experiences, along with industrial-arts classes in high school combined to further spark Marrs’ interest in the drafting and drawing aspects of architecture.

“When I entered college, I set my goal to become an architect,” he remembered, noting he earned his bachelor’s in architecture at Kansas State University in 1976. “I have never waived from that goal, and more than 45 years later I still have fun every day being an architect. “We work with clients to guide them through the decision-making process, preliminary and final designs, drawings and builder selections,” Marrs noted. “Our focus is on high-quality projects for government, civic and non-profit organizations.”

One of those projects is the new Camp Aldrich facility, which replaced the building that was destroyed by fire. It is one of several Barton Community College projects supported by DMA Architects since 2010. When discussing the strengths and challenges of the Camp Aldrich project, Marrs noted that the facility’s location fit into both categories. “The strength of the location is its prairie setting with natural rolling sand hills and landscape,” he said. “The challenge of its location was building a structure that meets building codes for fire-alarm and fire-sprinkler systems.



Donnie Marrs, Owner

“This was a big challenge because there was no water supply to support the sprinkler system,” he explained. “So we included a water supply, which we placed underground so that it didn’t distract from the site. The fire alarm needed telephone service, which required a special connection method and approval of the State Fire Marshal.” The new Camp Aldrich facility is larger, and improvements were made in the kitchen, convention space and in the lower level that doubles as a storm shelter.

Camp Hope, the annual event for children who have had or do have cancer, was also involved in the planning. “The facility will support the campers’ needs and is completely handicapped accessible,” Marrs said. “There are ramped sidewalks and an elevator.” While Camp Aldrich may be the most recent local project, DMA Architects has completed many others here. They include First Kansas Bank at 10th and McKinley; the entry to St. Rose Church; new CHS service facility and office building; Great Bend Housing Authority renovations; Great Bend Events Center renovations; and Red Barn’s new warehouse and distribution center.

Marrs’ colleagues at DMA are Project Architect Michael McCall, Project Manager Justin May and Office Manager Linda Woodfield. DMA is recruiting architects who want to join the DMA team; the company would like to staff a Great Bend office full-time.

“We have a collaborative work environment and when we find a good match with the client, everyone wins,” Marrs said, noting DMA is involved in 30-40 projects at any given time. “We enjoy a repeat-client base, which illustrates to prospective clients they can trust that the designs we produce are a complete reflection of their input. “The strength of our firm is derived from the constant effort to give our full attention to our clients,” he added. “It is this sensitivity to their needs that allows us to produce quality design solutions for a wide range of projects.”

DMA project categories are commercial, religious, residential and institutional. Even though learning at the knee of his grandfather was the first architectural spark of interest, Marrs also credits Jack Bowman, former BCC track coach, for offering encouragement. “Great Bend is where I got my start in higher education because of Coach Bowman’s persistence,” Marrs commented. “Coach Bowman got me to come to Great Bend from Clifton, Ks., when I was 17 years old. I met my wife in Great Bend and now we are living and working in the community. I want to help make Great Bend’s future successful.”

