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Seventy-five Years Strong in 2009, the Annual AIA Minnesota Convention Sustains its Success



Minneapolis, Minnesota - For the 75th consecutive year, AIA Minnesota will host its convention. "Sustaining a successful large-scale convention of this kind is no minor feat," says AIA Minnesota Executive Vice President Beverly Hauschild-Baron, Hon. AIA. And she should know, she's lead over 30 of AIA Minnesota's conventions. She credits the format used to create the convention and strong member involvement in the planning as critical key elements.

In the convention's earlier days, they were held at various hotels in the Twin Cities area and lasted one to two days. In the eighties, the convention was moved to the venue it continues to be held in today - the Minneapolis Convention Center - with programs spanning four days. "Geography has helped us maintain our consistently high member attendance," notes Beverly, "with 1,600 of our 2,200 members in the Twin Cities area, it eliminates the cost for overnight accommodations. Our members who work in the downtown area also find it convenient to come and go as they like to programs over the course of the four day convention."

AIA Minnesota has had many years to experiment with various program types, speakers and the exhibit hall format. The current format includes an initial keynote address, called the Member Congress, to kick off the convention and get members thinking of the broader goals of the organization and preps them with inspiration for the learning during the remainder of the convention programs. Historically, many of the incoming AIA national presidents have delivered a keynote. This year, George H. Miller, FAIA, AIA national's 2010 President, will present a special address "2010 and Beyond," highlighting how collaboration, inclusiveness, service, excellence and the belief that design matters, determine AIA's priorities as outlined in the AIA 2010-2015 strategic plan.

The convention, now annually averaging at least 45 programs, rivals other conventions in the country as well as the AIA National Convention. AIA Minnesota lines up five to six keynote addresses each year. A sampling from this year includes Craig Edward Dykers, AIA, Snøhetta; Richard Moe, Hon. AIA, President of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and Marc Tsurumaki, co-founder of Lewis.Tsurumaki.Lewis (LTL Architects). At least three of the keynotes are determined by an annual theme like the member congress' address to the membership, the honor awards "Jurors Show & Tell," and a leadership or motivational speaker to close out the convention on the fourth day.

"In addition to the high caliber of speakers we're able to attract, we have a tireless Convention Programs Committee that works year-round to build the convention's strong continuing



education component," says AIA Minnesota Continuing Education Director, Deanna Christiansen. Christiansen has been with AIA Minnesota in this role for over 20 years and along with committee members, oversees the process of developing the programs and securing the speakers. We solicit suggestions for speakers from our members and balance attendees' specific continuing education needs among tracks including design, materials and systems, practice, leadership and ethics, profession, residential, urban design, preservation, sustainable design and technology. "This year, due to the expense of hosting out-of-town speakers, we've looked to more local speakers," Christiansen noted. "It's really working in our favor in this economy where making local connections and networking is drawing heightened attention."

Michelle Mongeon-Allen, AIA, JLG Architects is this year's Convention Committee President. Mongeon-Allen has challenged the committee to address head-on the many new issues faced for the 2009 convention. "The reality is that significantly fewer architects and exhibitors can afford the convention this year," said Mongeon-Allen. "We have focused on networking activities during the exhibit hall, connecting members more to AIA Minnesota activities and volunteer opportunities within our community (Citizen Architect), and providing unemployed members with reduced registration or scholarships if they volunteer to help during convention." We hope by taking these proactive measures, as well as choosing local speakers and cutting out some additional perks (receptions, lunches, etc.), we can still put on a great convention and generate the revenue necessary to maintain the quality of our existing programs.

There has always been an optimism and forward-thinking message about the annual convention theme. This year's theme, **Converge | Emerge** represents the opportunity for architects to come together to hone their uniquely valuable skill sets and emerge as a stronger profession. In the recent past, architects might have been too busy to look ahead, set a new direction, or share expertise with community. The current economic climate places heightened value in relationships and involvement outside of practice.

On the more social side of the convention, is the Exhibit Hall. It's a lively place that's only open specific hours that offset the programs, hosting well over 200 product lines and a variety of professional services. The hall features displays of awards and themed projects from AIA Minnesota, its chapters and its 22 committees. The 2009 hall will highlight VJAA, recipient of the 2009 AIA Minnesota Firm Award and the 2008 AIA Minnesota Honor Awards.

The 75th annual AIA Minnesota Convention will take place Tuesday, November 10 – Friday, November 13, 2009, at the Minneapolis Convention Center. Over 1,500 people are projected to attend – 1,100 attending programs and the exhibitions, while another 400 will just visit the exhibit hall, which requires no registration and is free to the public.

For more information, to see the full program descriptions and to register, go to www.aia-mn.org/convention

The American Institute of Architects Minnesota, founded in 1892, is dedicated to strengthening our communities, improving our built environment and providing exceptional design. For more information on the organization and Minnesota architectural firms, reference our Web site at www.aia-mn.org and pick up a copy of Architecture Minnesota, the award-winning architectural magazine of the Midwest.