

Copeland sees increase in commercial design

Firm strives to continue founder's 30-year legacy

LeAnn Bjerken

November 5th, 2015



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Bob Britton, Jeff Fountain, and Austin Dickey, owners of Copeland Architecture & Construction Inc., moved the firm in February to an 1,800-square-foot space it designed at 121 W. Pacific.

Copeland Architecture & Construction Inc. owners Bob Britton, Jeff Fountain, and Austin Dickey say the company, long known for its design of Spokane-area homes, is gradually becoming known for commercial design as well.

“In the last few years, more of our work has been commercial,” says Fountain. “It’s pretty exciting because Copeland used to be almost exclusively residential when Bob took over years ago. But we’ve always wanted to diversify, and commercial was one area we wanted to expand in.”

Founded in 1985 by Gerry Copeland, the company then was passed to Britton, who serves as company president as well as construction manager for home projects.

Fountain is the company’s vice president and manages residential design projects. He says Dickey brought commercial-project experience to the firm when he joined it in 2007.

“He’s a major part of how we’ve been able to go after more commercial work,” Fountain says.

Dickey oversees commercial design and oversees the company’s finances.

“I would say last year there was definitely an increase in commercial projects versus residential,” says Dickey.

Fountain says that in 2013 residential design made up 60 percent of company revenues and commercial design was 40 percent. However, for the last two years, those percentages have swapped.

“In 2014 and 2015, we have essentially flipped, and now commercial is at 60 percent and residential is at 40 percent of design revenue,” Fountain says.

Although the commercial work is growing, he says he still considers residential design and construction to be the company’s bread and butter.

The company had \$2.3 million in gross revenue last year. Fountain says its design revenue, including both residential and commercial, is up more than 30 percent from a year ago and construction revenue, derived from projects in which it is acting as the general contractor, is up 40 percent.

“You have to keep in mind these numbers fluctuate, so we do have some ability to move around within the market,” Fountain says.

He says the company usually only constructs residential projects, although it has occasionally worked on commercial construction projects. The company builds both projects of its own design and some created by other architects. “That’s something we’ve only begun to do in the last few years,” says Fountain.

Copeland also has been expanding its geographical reach to include commercial projects in the Tri-Cities and Seattle areas, and residential projects as far west as Leavenworth.

“We’ve been getting more requests for design work in Central Washington, but North Idaho is also still very much a target area,” says Fountain.

In February of last year, the company moved to its current location at 121 W. Pacific, a 1,800-square-foot space which it designed.

“One of the owners of this building, C.K. Anderson, is a friend,” Fountain says. “He needed a tenant and kindly asked us if Copeland would like to design the building improvements.”

With this most recent move, he says Copeland is finally back in its old neighborhood, having begun in 1985 with offices at 216 W. Pacific. After 22 years, the company moved to the Schade Towers building, at 528 E. Spokane Falls Blvd., for seven years.

“There has been a lot of discussion in the community about how this area of town has been changing,” Fountain says. “We’re glad to be a part of it again.”

Some of the changes in the surrounding area are projects Copeland has been working on, like the Washington Cracker building, at 304 W. Pacific.

“That was a larger project at 40,000 square feet,” says Dickey. “But it was a lot of fun to work on. There is so much community interest and a cool mix of small business tenants moving in.”

In the last two years, the company has taken on more historic building renovations, and projects for local nonprofits such as Habitat for Humanity, Second Harvest Food Bank, and Spokane Public Radio.

“Second Harvest is an example of a nonprofit company we have done multiple projects with over the last four years,” Dickey says.

The three owners say Copeland also has been seeing a greater number of returning clients in both residential and commercial projects.

“We’ve seen almost half a dozen returning clients in just the last year,” says Fountain. “On the residential side, these are people who grew up in a Copeland house and now want us to create an addition, redesign, or remodel of the home.”

Britton agrees, saying, “One project leads into another, and it’s a good feeling to know they enjoy working with us.”

Copeland’s largest commercial design and remodel project to date has been the recent renovation project it did for Spokane Public Radio, renovating the old Fire Station No. 3 at 1229 N Monroe.

“It was a complicated project for many reasons,” says Fountain. “Firstly, it was a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) project as well as a historic building. Each of those types of projects have certain standards that have to be met. Secondly, the design had to take into account acoustics and broadcast sensitivity.”

“We needed an acoustical engineer to consult on that,” adds Dickey. “Although it was only about 11,000 square feet, there were a lot of technical things to consider that added to the complexity.” The project began in August of 2013 and was completed last month.

The company’s next large project will be assisting in the design and construction of cabins for the Sunrise Basin resort community that is being developed within the 49 Degrees North Ski area in Chewelah, Wash.

The Journal reported in August that John Eminger, the resort’s president and owner, had begun selling a mix of 35 single-family and multiunit residential lots near the base of its Sunrise quad chairlift. Construction on the first residential units in Aspen Glades is expected to begin in the spring of 2017.

Dickey says the company has been working on designs for single-family cabins to present to potential clients in the next year.

“We’re pretty excited,” he says.

Fountain says compared to most construction for the project, Copeland has more flexibility in designing the style of the cabins. “Things like townhomes and lodges all have similar styles and guidelines,” he explains. “We have more freedom than some of the larger projects that need consistent architecture.”

Fountain says so far Copeland will be working on residential builds for the project, but wouldn't mind getting involved in future commercial development in the area.

"We've been invited to be involved because they see us as bringing our expertise in residential design and build," says Fountain. "At the same time, it's a huge project that will span years of work. We have time to grow into it, and perhaps get more involved on the commercial side."

He says designers have met with prospective buyers and investors interested in the project several times to discuss what tenants might want to see there. "We're just starting to bring in plans and models, so it's getting more specific," he says.

This year also marks Copeland's 30th anniversary, one that its owners see as a continuing celebration.

"We feel like it's both a 30-year anniversary for the company as well as the 10-year anniversary of when Bob took over ownership," says Fountain.

Company founder Gerry Copeland passed away in 2010, which Fountain says was a tough year for the company.

"At that point we were still working to build back up after the recession," he says. "But we've kept the Copeland name all these years because Gerry established such a good practice. Now, we really just want to see it keep going as well as it has been."



- **LeAnn Bjerken**

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Reporter LeAnn Bjerken is the most recent addition to the Journal's news team. A poet, cat lover and antique enthusiast, LeAnn is also an Eastern Washington University alum.

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