

Architect's Perspective:

Reginald G. Sydnor, AIA:

Functionalism

Doug Sydnor, FAIA

Doug_sydnor@gensler.com



Arizona Contractor + Community magazine asked if I would feature Reginald G. Sydnor, AIA, an architect who practiced exclusively in Arizona for more than 35 years starting in the mid 1950's. And yes, he is my father.

Reginald thoroughly enjoyed a wonderful career creating significant architecture for the varied landscapes across Arizona. Phoenix was a very optimistic place, where anything was possible when he arrived in 1955. The state was rapidly growing and new housing, schools, and manufacturing, commercial, and institutional facilities were needed. Before my father flourished helping to shape Arizona, his path took him many places across the country.

Born in Bellpoint, West Virginia in 1928, Reginald grew up in nearby Huntington where he attended Marshall College of Liberal Arts from 1946-48. He then transferred to the University of Michigan, where he received a Bachelor of Architecture in 1952. That same year he

married fellow student Dorothy Mae Webb of Wichita, Kansas, a music major.

U.S. Civil Services recruited him to Bremerton, Washington where he drafted naval architecture. Soon thereafter, he relocated within the state to Yakima, and worked for two firms until 1955. Robert Sexton, FAIA, a University of Michigan classmate, then encouraged my parents to move to Phoenix where he joined Edward L. Varney Associates, A.I.A. as a Project Manager.

Reginald became an Associate in 1960, and a Partner in 1965 when the firm name changed to Varney Sexton Sydnor Architects, A.I.A. He remained there for 25 years until forming Sydnor Architects, P.C. in 1980, which was active until 1991. He later joined McLellan & Copenhagen Architects and Planners, Inc. of Cupertino, California until his retirement in 1994.

During Reginald's career, in which he specialized in institutional architecture, his work evolved toward a philosophy he might have described as functionalism: an



Images courtesy of Arizona Contractor + Community

approach that simply wanted the architecture to work in all respects. This would include floor plan flexibility, exterior durability, and building systems integration. The following three representative projects of Reginald's touch on these priorities.

Motorola came to the Phoenix area in the late 1940's and constructed a series of manufacturing plants. Varney Associates had designed the 52nd Street and McDowell Road plant. Soon afterwards, Reginald designed the Hayden and McDowell roads plant in Scottsdale. This 173,000 square-foot, two-story plant accommodated 3,500 employees.

Left: Sexton, Varney, & Sydnor (l-r), 1970s.

Top: Tilt-panel construction on the Motorola Plant at Hayden & McDowell Road, 1967.

Top right: Maricopa County Complex, Varney Sexton Sydnor, mid-1970s.

Right: ASU's Hiram Bradford Farmer Education building.



reduce the solar heat gain, while self-shading the wall with concrete panels.

ASU has maintained this building impeccably, which reflects the pride they have for this very functional structure. The project received a 2010 American Institute of Architects - Arizona 25 Year Award in its 50th anniversary year.

Phoenix's St. Luke's Hospital Medical Center had a major 202,000 square-foot expansion from 1965-69. The project scope included a new nine-story tower that accommodated a lobby, administrative offices, surgery, radiology, emergency, 600 nursing beds, and a ninth-floor shell for future physician offices, which did occur.

All nursing rooms were provided full-height windows and exterior balconies. Interiors utilized demountable partitions for easy reconfiguration and, for the first time in an Arizona hospital, carpet was installed for the acoustical and aesthetic benefits. The exterior used buff-colored brick walls, precast concrete panels, concrete structural components, and

Functionality was exploited with a flexible and adaptable floor plan, which was based upon a repetitive planning module. The structure was engineered to expand horizontally, which occurred on multiple occasions. Street elevation featured a vertical tower that not only identified Motorola, but was multifunctional as a testing station for antennae that the company actually manufactured in this plant.

Another major project was ASU's Hiram Bradford Farmer Education Building in Tempe, constructed in 1960. The 47,000 square feet, four-story structure has a courtyard plan, ringed by classrooms and faculty offices, which focuses on a centralized atrium. The atrium entries on all sides encourage natural breezes through the space convectively, which is a very effective passive cooling strategy. The building envelope minimizes glazing to







Images courtesy of author

aluminum window framing for a durable, long-lasting approach.

Other projects Reginald worked on include the Arizona Heart Institute, ASU Life Sciences Addition, Baptist Hospital of Phoenix, Bisbee High School, Cochise Community Junior College, Dunn Edwards store, Glendale Community College, John C. Lincoln Hospital, St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center, and Yuma Regional Medical Center to name a few. These works, among many others, are detailed in my 2011 book, *Plugging: The Architecture of Reginald Sydnor*.

Working with my father from 1977-89 taught me many lessons about professional and civic responsibilities. As an architect, Reginald was a superb draftsman and his original drawings were works of art. He knew how to build, how to document it, and do it with craft and care. He also mentored me through capturing an appropriate scale and good sound proportions in architecture. Civic responsibilities, where we leave our community better than we found it, were ingrained, and have been practiced by me since then.

Reginald went through life with the utmost integrity, and was as hardworking, honest, and trustworthy as anyone I have ever met. At the same time, he had very

strong beliefs and convictions about many subjects. This led him to self-publish a booklet, *What I Think*, in 2001. He left a great architectural legacy in Arizona and, maybe more importantly, many of life's lessons for his children, grandchildren, and his community.

"REGINALD WENT THROUGH LIFE WITH THE UTMOST INTEGRITY, AND WAS AS HARDWORKING, HONEST, AND TRUSTWORTHY AS ANYONE I HAVE EVER MET."

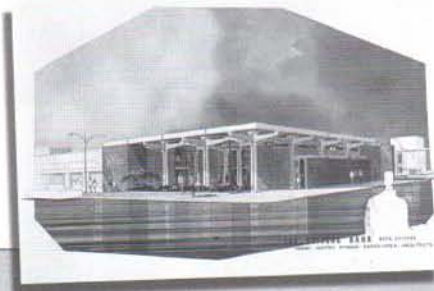
Reginald G. Sydnor, AIA, passed away on June 13, 2004 at the age of 75.

Opposite page: St. Luke's Hospital addition, early 1970s. **Inset:** St. Luke's Hospital Expansion, 1970s.

Top: ASU Hiram Bradford Farmer Education building.

Bottom left: Arizona Bank rendering, Varney Sexton Sydnor Architects, A.I.A., 1967.

Bottom right: Arizona Bank in Mesa next to the Waldorf Café, late 1960s.



Images courtesy of Arizona Contractor & Community