

Who knew NorthPoint had designs on the architecture market?

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NorthPoint Development has a 15 million-square-foot secret it's eager to disclose.

studioNorth Architecture, which NorthPoint launched in August 2015, celebrated its first year in business as the top industrial design firm in the Kansas City area.

"One challenge we have had, though, is that no one knows about studioNorth, and we need to hire more people," NorthPoint CEO Nathaniel Hagedorn said.

studioNorth, which is based at NorthPoint's Riverside headquarters, was started with principals Robb Waters and Ron Schauwecker, who previously worked together for 17 years at Overland Park-based Finkle + Williams Architecture.

There, Waters and Schauwecker worked with Hagedorn on improvements for office tenants at Briarcliff, and then, after Hagedorn left Briarcliff Development Co. to launch NorthPoint, on industrial buildings in Riverside and Logistics Park Kansas City in Edgerton.

In March 2015, Schauwecker accepted NorthPoint's offer to join the firm as a development project manager, and NorthPoint made a similar offer to Waters.

"But I had kind of been bitten by the entrepreneurial bug," said Waters, who was flirting with the idea of starting a firm. "So I said let me think about it."

NorthPoint President Chad Meyer, who extended the project manager offer to Waters, thought about the situation, too, and eventually came back with a different offer.

He suggested that Waters and Schauwecker launch an architectural firm within NorthPoint, which could reduce their startup costs and give access to administrative, marketing, legal and logistics support.

"And best of all," Schauwecker said, "we had a huge built-in client."

Since forming studioNorth, Waters and Schauwecker have designed 15 NorthPoint industrial buildings, totaling 9 million square feet, that now are complete or under construction. In addition, they are designing 10 more buildings, totaling 6 million square feet, that are in various preconstruction phases.

"We're working in seven states right now and looking to add three more states," Schauwecker said. "We go where NorthPoint goes."

But the principals also would like to add third-party jobs and work in other sectors besides industrial, Waters said. So they're preparing to expand their staff of four, which includes the two principals and two intern architects.

The firm may add and develop additional young architects in the future, Waters added, "but right now, we're looking for stars, people who can hit the ground running."

Running is part of the game at studioNorth, Schauwecker said, "because working for a developer, everything is about speed to market."

studioNorth demonstrated how fast and nimble it can be a couple of weeks ago, when the principals learned that a build-to-suit prospect was flying in to look at a potential development site.

Although the prospect was already in the air, Waters said, "by the time the plane landed, we had emailed layouts so that they could look at how the site could accommodate their requirements."

Having architects on board is one more way for NorthPoint to add value for its clients, who already benefit from NorthPoint engineers who serve as project managers.

The company recruited Meyer, an engineer himself, in 2012, while he was working with ARCO National Construction Co. Inc. on NorthPoint's first industrial building in Riverside Horizons. Meyer has since been joined by a number of electrical, civil, geotechnical and industrial engineers.

On a complex, fast-track project, Meyer said, "having those engineers help design and drive unnecessary cost out of the building has proven to be a notable value for a lot of our clients."

The same is true of the studioNorth architects.

Schauwecker is working on a 1.1 million-square-foot logistics optimization center in St. Louis for one of NorthPoint's biggest clients, General Motors.

Waters, meanwhile, is working on the Kansas City area's largest industrial building ever completed on a speculative basis, meaning before tenants are signed. The 927,000-square-foot spec is in Logistics Park Kansas City, which opened in late 2013 adjacent to BNSF Railway's \$250 million intermodal freight hub.

NorthPoint, master developer of the 1,700-acre logistics park, already has leased more than 5 million square feet of structures at LPKC. But it has capacity for 17 million square feet, so Waters and Schauwecker aren't too worried about keeping an expanded staff busy.



ROB ROBERTS | KCBJ

Ron Schauwecker (left) and Robb Waters are principals for studioNorth Architects, the largest industrial design firm you may have never heard of.

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