

JOURNAL BUSINESS



Adeptus Architecture was awarded the \$80 million "Residential Honors College and Greek Village Student Housing" project at the New Jersey Institute of Technology in Newark.

Big stage, small footprint

Small Upstate architecture firm takes on the national firms

By **DICK HUGHES** | contributor

With ambition, talent and high technology, Adeptus Architecture has grown in 25 years from a small firm doing small projects in the Upstate to a smaller firm doing larger and more varied projects on a national stage.

It's what Barry Agnew had in mind in 1986 when he left a Greenville firm that "did a very narrow range" of architecture to go out on his own to do a wide range of work.

For the first 10 years, he focused on "relatively small work in commercial, residential, office buildings, restaurants and churches" with construction costs around \$10 million

annually. Adeptus today is responsible for more than 10 times that.

Just two projects alone, one in Newark, N.J., and the \$12-million Cherokee County administration building, represent more than \$100 million.

Recently, the firm changed its name from Agnew-Rincon Architecture to Adeptus, "specialized expertise" in Latin, to recognize "the progression of our practice over the last 25 years ... (and) expansion of our client base to a national venue," Agnew said.

In one of its biggest scores, Adeptus was

ADEPTUS continued on PAGE 28

Employment picture improves in Upstate

By **CHARLES SOWELL** | staff

Spartanburg's jobless rate held steady at 8.6 percent in April, down from 10 percent a year ago, while Greenville slipped a notch to 7 percent from 7.1 percent, the state Department of Employment and Workforce reported this week.

Statewide the unemployment rate was down from 8.9 percent in March to 8.8 percent in April.

The decline came despite a workforce reduction of 6,055 to slightly more than 2.1 million, due to many people abandoning the search for work. The agency said the ranks of the unemployed declined by 2,799 to 189,865 persons.

"While this is great news, we're going to keep working hard to keep working hard to make our state the most competitive in the country for business development and bring more jobs for our people," said Gov. Nikki Haley.

The agency said 28,290 people have found jobs in the past year, showing the state's economy continues to improve.

"The decline in the state's unemployment rate cou-

JOBS continued on PAGE 28



AQUOS BOARD

It's not just a display, it's your business.

Communicate, Collaborate, Disseminate on an affordable, large touch screen LCD whiteboard display to make every presentation unforgettable.

864.675.2000 | sharp-sbs.com

SHARP

SHARP BUSINESS SYSTEMS

awarded contracts in early 2011 for the \$84-million Warren Street Village being constructed by the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) on the perimeter of its urban Newark campus.

Adeptus won the commission, which is part of a larger urban renewal project, in a year-long design competition with major national firms. The challenge was to not only design the structures, but to bring a holistic approach to the 3.4-acre village comprising dorms, an honors college, restaurant, office space, convenience store and fitness center surrounding green space.

After a year of planning and

we are doing some major urban projects that are helping with our notoriety," Agnew said. The firm now is working with clients in 15 states.

To Agnew's point, out of the NJIT project came feelers from Rutgers University, which is interested in a "number of projects" on its urban Newark campus, and a feature scheduled for this fall in *Strategize Magazine*, a national publication aimed at high-level corporate and institutional officers.

Being able to take on these varied aspects of a major project in an urban setting was beyond Adeptus' capability 10-20 years ago, but "the technologies we use in our business today allows us to do that kind of work."

Interior design has become a

"Clients will strongly consider us now who would not have in the past when they wanted a local presence to have an architect available on short notice."

Barry Agnew, managing principal and senior mentoring partner for Adeptus, on how the internet has broadened the firm's clientele.

"consensus building" with college and city officials, planners and residential neighbors, ground was broken on the village on May 1.

"We are doing all the interior design, all the furniture, all the interior finishes, all the communications and technology equipment," Agnew said in an interview. "We are doing this as a LEED silver facility, so we are doing the sustainability studies as well."

The firm's decision six or seven years ago to compete nationally for more design-image architecture "is starting to blossom as

"growing part of our practice," Agnew added, a payoff from his decision several years ago to become one of the few licensed architects to be certified as an interior designer.

Having that extra expertise is "very attractive to clients because you can coordinate the interior design with the architecture rather than outsourcing it to another firm, giving you a higher degree of being able to tie everything together."

Computer imaging and communications technology have



changed the nature of architecture, allowing relatively small firms to take on large projects anywhere in the country without breaking the bank with overhead.

If a presence is needed on site, Agnew said, all you need is an airport. Otherwise, the Internet's vast capability for communicating and moving documents back and forth and the ability for instant teleconferencing allows for daily management of projects anywhere without leaving Greenville, he said.

"Clients will strongly consider us now who would not have in the past when they wanted a local presence to have an architect available on short notice."

The economies are significant. A few years ago, when it had spread its client base regionally, Adeptus had "settled in around the \$50-million-a-year range" doing 30-40 projects a year and had a technical staff of 20, including architects and draftsmen.

With technological advances, outsourcing of engineering and a horizontal hierarchy, Agnew today keeps Adeptus' staff to 10 "highly trained" architects doing around 20 much larger projects of significantly more construction value.

"We are trying to have fewer, but higher-level, employees. We no longer employ middle-level draftsmen. Everybody in the firm is at project manager level or above."

The business that propelled Adeptus from local to regional to national was university work. Early

on, the firm won the commission for the renovation of Clemson's Fike Recreation Center and that "got us interested" in larger institutional projects, Agnew said.

"One thing led to another and we started spreading out in university work. About seven years ago we ... were practicing up and down the East Coast a little bit. Then as a national firm we accepted commissions in Chicago, Missouri, Indiana, Pennsylvania and Florida. We started doing university work on a broader scale."

Agnew finds university work fulfilling because it "is an opportunity to do a lot of different buildings, everything from dormitories to athletic facilities to classroom buildings to administration buildings. The second thing is that most universities are extremely image-conscious and that lends itself to design-oriented structures."

Agnew was quick to add that in pursuing large national projects, Adeptus is not abandoning "our roots in the Upstate" and will continue to do commercial and institutional projects locally.

As an example, he cited the work the firm did with local officials and residents in making design elements of the new Gaffney administration building reflect "the historic nature of the city and the architecture of the old cotton mills."

"I am revitalized in my career," said Agnew, now 54, who has seen his ambition to take on a wider array of design challenges come together with a firm of "young and talented architects" building a national reputation.

Contact Dick Hughes at dhughes@greenvillejournal.com.

pled with the number of jobs announcements in recent months show positive signs of growth and stability for South Carolina's economy," said Abraham Turner, the agency's executive director.

All but one of the sectors surveyed showed increases in employment between March and April, when not adjusted for seasonal fluctuations. Non-farm payrolls increased by 13,500 workers.

As far as the state's metro areas, the jobless rate dropped in Florence to 9.4 percent in April compared with 9.5 percent in March. In Charleston and Columbia, jobless numbers held even at 7.1 percent and 7.5 percent, respectively.

Marion County reported the highest jobless rate in April at 16.8 percent. Marlboro reported a jobless rate of 15.7 percent and Barnwell was 13.7 percent.

Lexington County claimed the lowest jobless rate at 6.6 percent in April, down from 6.7 percent in March.

Contact Charles Sowell at csowell@greenvillejournal.com.

BILTMORE DINING SET
Now offering the finest in solid wood dining furniture hand crafted in America by the AMISH. Choose the style, size, wood, and finish for your custom dining set. Now on display with special pricing at Uncle Jake's Furniture.

Uncle Jake's
FURNITURE
QUALITY FINISHED & UNFINISHED FURNITURE

Quality WOOD FURNITURE

185 Halton Rd. • Greenville, SC • 864.675.9191 unclejakesfurniture.com

Camelot CINEMAS

Buy tickets online!
www.GreenvilleCamelot.com
E. Antrim Dr., McAlister Square • 864.235.6700
\$6.50 BARGAIN SHOWS BEFORE 6PM

NOW SHOWING: FRIDAY, MAY 25 - THURSDAY, MAY 31

IN THE BIG THEATRE
MEN IN BLACK 3 (PG13)
1:00 • 3:05 • 5:15
7:20 • 9:30

PRESENTED IN DIGITAL PROJECTION:
MARVEL'S THE AVENGERS UltraMax In Digital (PG13)
1:15 • 4:00 • 7:00 • 9:40
MARVEL'S THE AVENGERS In Digital (PG13) 12:30 • 3:15 • 6:15 • 9:00
WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU'RE EXPECTING (PG13)
12:30 • 2:45 • 5:00 • 7:15 • 9:30
BATTLESHIP UltraMax (PG13) 1:30 • 4:15 • 7:00 • 9:40
THE DICTATOR (R) 1:30 • 3:20 • 5:15 • 7:20 • 9:30
DARK SHADOWS (PG13) 12:30 • 2:45 • 5:00 • 7:15 • 9:30