



SCOTT PAULUS

Garry Webb II (center with Tim Weiss, left, and John Miceli, right) . . . "I think it's especially important for me, a minority, to show them that you can make it if you try."

Scholarship program, internships help Eppstein Uhen Architects draw more minorities into field

BY DAVID DOEGE  
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People like Garry Webb II and Tim Weiss are in short supply in the field of architecture.

In a profession dominated by white males, Webb, who is black, and Weiss, who is part Hispanic, bring diversity when it's keenly sought and hard to attain.

'The profession is **SEVERELY UNDERREPRESENTED** by minorities.'

**John Miceli**  
Eppstein Uhen Architects

Architects Inc. in Milwaukee, where Webb and Weiss each work.

Most in the architectural field agree.

"The profession is keenly aware of the need for greater diversity," said Bob Greenstreet, the Milwaukee city planner and dean of the University of Wisconsin-Mil-

## Designing more opportunities

waukee School of Architecture and Urban Planning. "It's been very hard to expand the richness of people entering the field."

Demographic data from the American Institute of Architects from 2004, the most recent data available, placed the group's minority membership at 3 percent Asian, 2 percent Hispanic and 1 percent black.

The institute's 2008 strategic plan includes a push to "expand the diversity of the design professions to mirror the society we serve," according to a position statement on the topic.

"The answer, we believe, is not to continue to fight over the same small pool, but to make the pool bigger," Greenstreet said.

Weiss and Webb are beneficiaries of Eppstein Uhen's efforts to grow the pool. Both

received scholarships that the firm, which employs 150, has offered over the past 12 years to minority students studying architecture at UW-Milwaukee and Milwaukee Area Technical College.

"We try to look at people who have the greatest need while showing strong potential," Miceli said. "It gives them an opportunity to focus on their education while not having to worry about the funding side."

Weiss, 32, came from Peoria, Ill., to Milwaukee in 1994 to attend UWM, but had to take one year off from his studies to lower his tuition costs by establishing state residency. Today, Weiss serves as a senior graphics specialist with Eppstein Uhen, whose notable projects include the new Milwaukee Intermodal Station.

"I learned while I was in the School of Architecture that there were funding options but there were very few scholarships that actually pertained to architecture," Weiss recalled. "There are definitely more to choose from now than there were then."

Weiss received the Eppstein Uhen scholarship in 1998, one year after Webb.

Webb, 32, became interested in architecture long before college, while in grade school. He had no idea at that early age that what he was doing would some day earn him a living.

"I developed the interest basically through my father, who was a carpenter," said Webb, who grew up in Milwaukee and now lives in Menomonee Falls. "I went along with him a lot when he was working. While he was working, I would draw what he was building."

Webb, who is an architect-project assistant with Eppstein Uhen, said he believes more youths would become interested in architecture if they learned more about it while still in high school.

"I think there is a lack of education about the field," Webb said. "The high school level is the appropriate time to help make them understand what the field is about."

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Webb backs his belief up by attending career days at area middle and high schools, and occasionally has students shadow him for a day at work.

"There are a lot of misconceptions out there about what we do," he said.

## LACK OF ROLE MODELS

Miceli said he believes one reason minority youths aren't drawn to architecture is because they don't see people like themselves doing it.

"There aren't a lot of minority role models so they're not attracted to it," he said. "To overcome that you've got to make efforts to try and attract them."

Webb and Weiss said the summer internship that accompanied the scholarship they received added to their interest in the field.

"To get that experience is very different than what you get in school," Weiss said.

"That was the way to learn that the field was about not only drawing, but marketing and project management," Webb said. "It gives you more of an exposure and it allows you to see a building become real."

The internship also gives the recipients an important "foot in the door," according to Miceli, something not lost on Webb and Weiss, both of whom continued to work at Eppstein Uhen after graduating.

"It's not an easy thing getting in with a firm when you're coming out of school and you

have no experience," Webb said. "I was one of the lucky ones."

Webb said he finds it important to share the story about his successful career path with young people who come from troubled backgrounds.

"I think it's especially important for me, a minority, to show them that you can make it if you try," he said. "I think it's important to give back to the community."



Greenstreet

Webb contributes through Eppstein Uhen's participation in a mentoring program with Lincoln Avenue Elementary School on Milwaukee's south side.

For the past several years, 12 to 18 professionals from the firm visit the school at 1817 W. Lincoln Ave. every

other week during a lunch hour to meet with students identified by school officials as needing guidance.

"These are kids who for one reason or another need a positive influence in their lives," said Janine Cano Graber, school principal. "A lot of the kids just need a sounding board. It's a program that has really blossomed."

Besides meeting with the children at school, Eppstein Uhen employees take them to a Milwaukee Brewers game, invite them to the firm for a workday visit and include them in an annual holiday party.

"We kind of invented it as we went along," said Miceli. "It's become very rewarding."

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