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## A new voice for Seattle's minority architects

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When Leon Holloway moved to Seattle four years ago, he didn't know anyone. He had just graduated from Indiana's Ball State University with an architecture degree, and his interest in Northwest architects like James Cutler lured him here. But Holloway ended up taking a job at the Olive Garden while he looked for work at Seattle architecture firms. Now, Holloway is an architect at NAC|Architects, working on the Bellevue High School addition, and is president of the newly minted Seattle chapter of the National Organization of Minority Architects. Holloway hopes the chapter can help other minority architects find their footing in the Seattle architecture scene, and provide more publicity for work by local minority architects. Such an organization would have helped him find a job here more quickly, he said.

"I know there are a lot of minority architects here, but I don't really run into them or see them," Holloway said "It would have been great to have people mentor me."

The National Organization of Minority Architects was founded in 1971 in Detroit and there are chapters in San Francisco and Los Angeles, but none in the Northwest.

Seattle architect Donald King of DKA was among the organization's found-

ers in Detroit. King has practiced in Seattle since 1981 and said he worked for two years here before ever meeting another African-American architect. Eventually, he met Mel Streeter, who served as informal mentor to King and several other young African-American architects here. Streeter founded Seattle's first black-owned architectural firm in 1967, Streeter & Associates Architects, and died in 2006.

King, who serves as an advisory board member for NOMA NW, said he is delighted a chapter is finally opening here.

"The Northwest in a number of ways is kind of isolating for African Americans," King said. "We're not in as large of numbers that you would find in California or the eastern states or the South, so professional organizations are difficult to amass."

The organization will be a boon to all local firms seeking more diversity, King said, not just minority architects and owners.

"The idea is that diversity makes better architects. It makes architects that relate better to the community," King said. "What we do as architects becomes more visible."



Holloway



King



Quirindongo

Founders also want the organization to help Seattle's minority students see architecture as a career option. Holloway said he is planning to make presentations at local colleges and high schools.

Rico Quirindongo, an architect at DKA who serves on the board of NOMA NW, said, "The organization can begin to address the outreach that we want to be doing to try to pull young talent from the minority community into the design industry. You've also got a lot of architecture students saying 'Who is out there for me?'"

Quirindongo, who designed the Northwest African American Museum with King, said he knows it can be difficult for non-minority architects to understand why such an organization is needed. He said many minority architects don't realize until they start practicing the role that race and culture will have in the work they want to pursue.

"I was surprised myself at how motivated I was to work for a minority-owned firm," Quirindongo said. "The extracurricular activities that I engaged in as a young student seeking professional development linked me up with minority firm owners who were interested in the same things I was."

Holloway said he hopes the organization will also make the community more aware of the quality of work being done here by minority architects.

"I think it's a good idea to publicize that minority architects and minority firms can do more than just community work," he said. "We can do the high-end residential and high-end commercial projects."

Quirindongo said architects have already driven from Tacoma to attend meetings and events.

"I meet a lot of other minority designers young and old who I never would otherwise have met," he said. "(You) get outside your own experience and benefit from somebody else's."

NOMA NW just applied for non-profit status, recently named members to its board and participated in AIA Seattle's Summer Solstice program. Learn more about NOMA NW at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SeaNOMA/>