

*Bernardon Rendering
of 2000 Pennsylvania
Avenue*



Against the Odds

Delaware's AEC Industry Emerges Agile and Innovative Through COVID-19 Uncertainty

BY WILLIAM E. HOLLOWAY, AIA, LEED AP

ECONOMIST AND HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL professor Theodore Levitt is credited with the words, “Creativity is thinking up new things. Innovation is doing new things.” As architects and designers, we are in the business of creating new structures within the built environment, and oftentimes, this requires great measures of innovation. Nothing has challenged Delaware’s Architecture, Engineering, and Construction (AEC) industry’s creativity and pushed our innovation more than the events that occurred in year 2020. Now, a year later, the AEC industry is continuing to thrive and much of this success is reflective of its ability to adapt and innovate.

When the reality of COVID-19 hit Delaware a year ago, many companies, including Bernardon, faced the extraordinary circumstance of navigating business in the face of a pandemic. As shutdowns began at the local and

then state level, businesses had to contend with the challenge of conducting operations while staff was relegated to remote working conditions. Within the AEC industry, a world that’s so reliant on collaboration and physical teamwork, remote working posed a new challenge. At Bernardon, we successfully transitioned to a remote, laptop-based working model; the first time in our 48-year history where every member of our 78-person firm worked from home.

Although we seamlessly transitioned to working remotely, we soon encountered unexpected roadblocks. As a regional firm with two offices in Pennsylvania and one office in Delaware, we faced the challenges of economic shutdown. In Pennsylvania, the construction industry was nearly brought to a standstill when it was deemed a non-essential industry, and many public and private construction sites closed temporarily. When Governor Carney classified



Bernardon Rendering of FinTech at STAR Campus

redevelopment of the University’s Dickinson dormitory property is scheduled to be completed and opened before the start of the 2021 academic year. Just north of The Rail Yard, in the heart of the City of Newark, the Hyatt Hotel, an adaptive reuse of the historic Green Mansion, will bring the first walkable, high-rise hotel to the City’s coveted Main Street. Bernardon is proud to have served as architect for these three projects among the many in Delaware that are still in progress.

As creators of built environments in Delaware and the surrounding Tri-State region, we are committed members of our community, and strive to provide the highest degree of architectural design in the region. Bernardon’s vision statement is Dream. Design. Succeed., and much like Levitt’s wise words around creation and innovation, this statement guides us towards a visionary and action-oriented approach which has solidified our ability to remain agile and innovative business partners into 2021. ■

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the AEC industry in Delaware as an essential service, AEC services continued to forge on against the odds.

This continuation was a testament to many agencies’ efforts in maintaining open communication with the Governor, leading many state-run and publicly-funded projects to continue. “When things started to shut down, we didn’t know what the coming weeks would bring,” said Bryon Short, executive vice president of the Delaware Contractors Association. “Through tremendous amounts of communication with the Governor, we were able to establish protocols to keep the construction industry going in Delaware. By pulling together our community to ensure that all construction crews were maintaining safety measures, as well as Governor Carney’s incredible responsiveness to the situation, Delaware’s construction industry has been able to thrive.”

Yet, it wasn’t simply a transition to working remotely and enduring the challenges of an unforeseen shutdown that forged opportunities for innovation. As a response to AEC services being deemed essential, many projects that were in the works when the pandemic struck could continue with development plans. As an example, the plans for the Bernardon-designed Jerry Ann McLamb Medical Pavilion in Sussex County are currently moving forward with the help of a new partnership with DiSabatino Construction.

A continuation of the multifamily boom and historically low interest rates for investors and developers drove new and existing opportunities for development. In the City of Wilmington, 2000 Pennsylvania Avenue, a new mixed-use development owned by Tsionas Management and designed by Bernardon, was completed last summer, bringing luxury apartments with a resident parking garage and retail space to the busy corridor of Pennsylvania Avenue.

Moreover, the surge in P3 and private investments brought a variety of new development to towns that are home to major universities. In Newark, construction of The FinTech Building at the University of Delaware’s STAR Campus has seen steady progress. Just off campus, The Rail Yard, the

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