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Wenzler family leads firm through good times and bad

By [Alysha Schertz](#) , of SBT

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William Wenzler founded Milwaukee-based Wenzler Architects in August of 1955. His son Edward, began working at the office when he was in junior high, and took so much interest in the business that he eventually followed his father's lead and became an architect.

Edward married his wife Georgine, and they had two sons. The oldest, Christopher, studied architecture and joined the family firm as a full time employee in 2006.

"I had another son and two other daughters, and while they all showed interest and passion for the arts, they never really took interest in architecture," William said.

Edward became a full time employee after he graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 1978, and later took over the role of president in 1985.

"As I reflect on it, the significant thing during that transition was that after I proposed he become president he just made one thing very clear. He said that if he was going to take over, he was going to be boss. Which was a little bit of an adjustment for me, but it was essential otherwise it never would have worked," William said. "I stayed on to offer my experience as help wherever I could."

Since its formation, the firm has clung to its family and faith-based principles to get through. Even through hard times, while Edward and other employees had to find other part time work, they clung to each other and always came back to the family, William said.

In November of 2008, the family was dealt a striking blow. Edward, 58, passed away after suffering a massive heart attack.



Georgine, William and Christopher Wenzler have kept the family business in tact through prayer and unity since 1955.

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His wife Georgine, a pastor of worship and music at Eastbrook Church in Milwaukee, became sole stock owner of the company.

"Architecture and the business was important to him, and from the beginning he brought that life home with him. It became important to me as well, our family the business and our sons," Georgine said. "I decided that I wanted to be an active owner in the company, and while my background was in business arts we decided as a board that I had a lot of management skills and experience."

After many hours of prayer and discussion, the decision was made to keep the business in the family, she said.

William came back as president of the firm until Christopher could gain a few more years of experience before accepting that role. Ed and Georgine's youngest son, Michael, also holds a position in the firm and on the board of directors, but does not intend to pursue architecture permanently.

"We feel that's the way Ed would have wanted it, and that it was definitely the right decision for us," Georgine said.

According to William, there is a tremendous advantage in having your family close by when making business decisions. At one point Wenzler had three generations working directly in the firm, and also has a board of directors made up entirely of family members.

"We all have the same vision and goals for the company, we know what each other is going to do, and we have complete trust for each other," he said. "It hasn't always been easy, but with family close by it makes hard times a little bit easier."

The firm has three other registered architects on staff that aren't related, but according to William, they fit in just like family.

"I can't ever remember ever ending up with a confrontation after Ed took over, we would always pray and discuss and come up with the right answer," William said. "It just doesn't happen with us."

"We just enjoy our work so much, and enjoy working together," Christopher said. "We always put each other, the family, and the business ahead of ourselves. We just desire the best for each other."

According to Christopher, he plans to lean on the experience of his grandfather, William, and the other architects as long as he can before taking over as president.

"I have been blessed in that my family has given me many opportunities to learn how to be creative and handle many different situations," he said. "At the same time I have been watched by some of the best eyes, and I hope to continue learning from Bill and the other architects as long as I can."



About Alysha Schertz

Alysha Schertz is a reporter with BizTimes Milwaukee, covering the technology beat. She also handles Personnel File and BizNotes submissions for the publication. Alysha is a 2007 graduate of Carroll College. Alysha's contact information is below. News also can be sent to Alysha Schertz, BizTimes Milwaukee, 126 N. Jefferson St., Suite 403, Milwaukee, WI 53202.

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