

# Members and Firms

## The Voice of Experience

*America's oldest worker, an architect, is honored at AIA national headquarters*



by Tracy F. Ostroff

Associate Editor

Harold M. Fisher is an architect who truly enjoys his work. And that's a very good thing, because he's been designing religious buildings for more than 70 years. Furthermore, the 100-year-old practitioner says he has no

plans to stop anytime soon.

Fisher was honored December 10 at AIA national headquarters as America's oldest worker, by members of Green Thumb, Inc.; Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary for Aging Josefina Carbonell; and AIA Executive Vice President/CEO Norman L. Koonce, FAIA.

Fisher is believed to be the oldest practicing designer in the country. He is president and chief architect of Harold H. Fisher & Associates, a firm he founded in 1945 in Harper Woods, Mich., a suburb of Detroit. Fisher still works five days a week, six to eight hours a day. Oh, and he exercises at a local health club, too.

Fisher credits his work for his longevity. "My first love is design," he said. "I never had dying in my mind at all because I love my work and spent so much time at the office." When asked what is the secret to long life, he gave this simple advice: "don't die."

From the time he became an understudy to a church architect for \$2 a day in Uniontown, Pa., at 15, he spent years learning the architectural disciplines of school buildings and churches. He credits the Beaux Arts Institute of Design, New York City, where he studied traditional and classic architectural styles, for providing him with an understanding of sacred architecture, the foundation of the guiding principles of his architectural practice. It was there, he said, he developed an understanding and appreciation for religious architecture.

"The only way to get good design is to learn good design and

get into it." He also took time to praise the AIA for its own contributions to architecture.

In honoring Fisher, Koonce noted that religious architecture is one of the most important vocational callings a mortal being is offered during his life.

Fisher has designed hundreds of churches in Michigan and across the country and planned religious facility-related projects, such as renovations, additions, and alterations. He has won awards for his ecclesiastical design and in 1995 was one of eight architects recognized by *Progressive Architecture* for lifetime achievements. His favorite project among his work is the

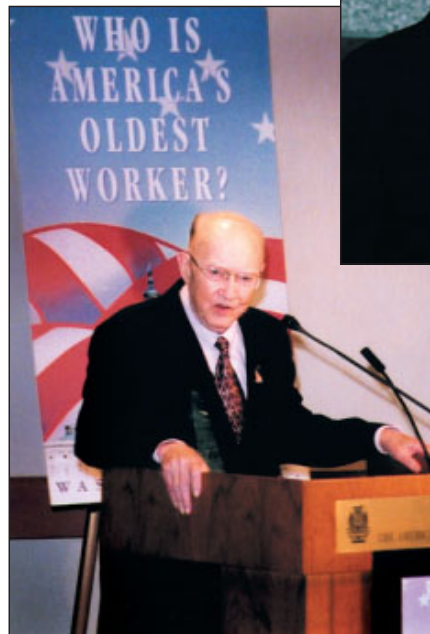


Centenarian architect Harold Fisher expressed his delight to AIA EVP/CEO Koonce that his award was presented at the AIA headquarters.

Westminster Presbyterian Church, Detroit, his first comprehensive project. He told ABCNews.com that he wakes up every day with new ideas and that no two of his designs are alike.

"If you have good design it appeals to the public. They should come into it and find peace and comfort." The designer, he advised, should also keep that principle in mind for the building's interiors. For example, he said, when elderly women entered the interior of a church he had designed, and walked up to the nave, they started crying. He said the pastor was happy with their

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reaction because it meant that, "we hadn't missed it."

Fisher said the church has always been a part of his life. Good ecclesiastical design, he said, is anything that helps people "find the Lord and be happy in church."

At the ceremony honoring Fisher, Assistant Secretary for Aging Carbonell said Fisher's churches have created a sense of community that makes America a great country. She said to Fisher, "you have earned your wings and halo, too."

Fisher is optimistic about the future. "Since it's my company they can't fire me," Fisher said. "You might say I'm retired now and doing what I love to do, but I'm still working."

The event was cosponsored by Green Thumb, a Virginia-based nonprofit organization that provides job training and placement for seniors, and lobbies on their behalf. Green Thumb Inc. will be changing its name to Experience Works at the beginning of the new year. You can visit them at [www.experienceworks.org](http://www.experienceworks.org) 

