

Foundations & Perspectives

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of the Capitol

Go Under Grounds



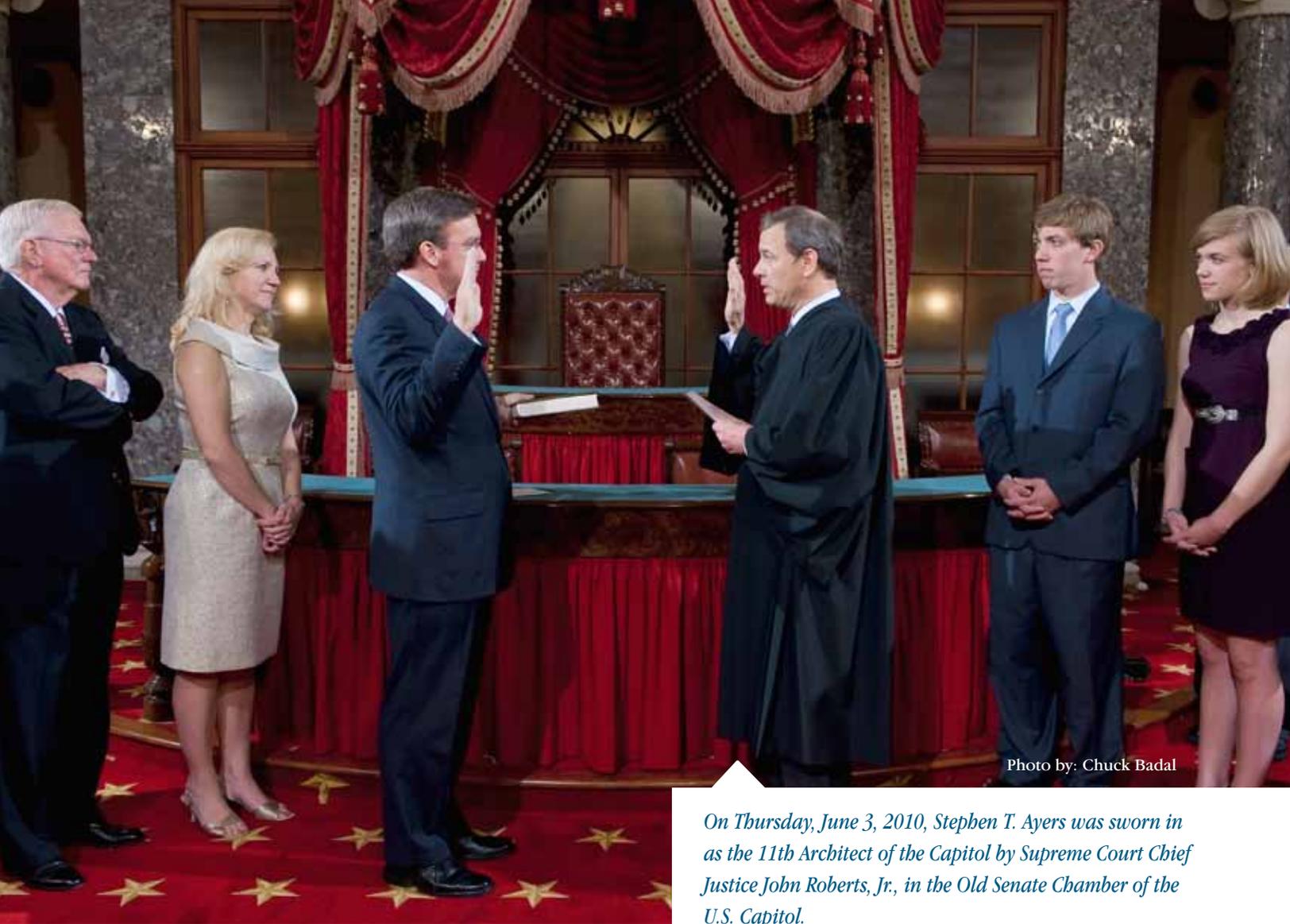


Photo by: Chuck Badal

On Thursday, June 3, 2010, Stephen T. Ayers was sworn in as the 11th Architect of the Capitol by Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, Jr., in the Old Senate Chamber of the U.S. Capitol.



Photo by: Chuck Badal

Jimmie Bird with the Plumbing Division of Capitol Grounds goes under the Senate Park Fountain to inspect the valves.

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Front Cover: Photo by Chuck Badal

Charlton Lewis has been keeping the Capitol clean since 1962—the equivalent of personally cleaning up after more than 120 Super Bowls.

Letter from the Architect



Thomas Jefferson wrote to Pierre L'Enfant in 1791 that, “whenever it is proposed to prepare plans for the Capitol, I should prefer the adoption of some one of the models of antiquity which have had the approbation of thousands of years.”

Jefferson also wrote to James Madison that when public buildings are erected that they should serve as “models for...study and imitation.”

The words of Jefferson serve as well today as they did 225 years ago.

Today, we face many challenges that range from meeting energy reduction goals to delivering modern technology needs often within historic and iconic spaces. We must continue to serve as a model that can be studied and imitated across the nation and around the world—as we work to serve, preserve and sustain the home of American democracy.

“While I have been privileged to serve with the AOC for the past thirteen years, I am even more excited about the next ten years.”

On June 3, 2010, I was honored to take the oath of office as the 11th Architect of the Capitol from Chief Justice John Roberts, Jr., in the Old Senate Chamber in the Capitol. In so doing, it is my expectation to serve you, our organization, the Congress and the American people in a way that honors the work of those who served this institution long ago—and those who have long served our agency.

This includes individuals like Charlton Lewis, who has served the AOC for 48 years and made the Capitol a more beautiful space everyday (see Under Grounds page 8). And individuals like Benn Wilson who inspire us all to remember the sacrifices made everyday to defend the freedoms that the Capitol represents (see Army to Architect page 16).

While I have been privileged to serve with the AOC for the past 13 years, I am even more excited about the next 10 years. We are an organization grounded in history, staffed by hardworking people doing great things everyday, inspiring me as much as Thomas Jefferson has to lead this agency in a way reflective of our grounding in antiquity and as model for the nation.

I hope you will join with me on our quest for the next 10 years to tackle the great challenges that lie ahead and when we are done, we can look back together at a job well done and know that we have honored the legacy of those who came before us and those who will carry it into the future.

Stephen T. Ayers, AIA, LEED AP
Architect of the Capitol



AOC Receives

Photos: AOC Office of Photography

Outstanding Commitment to Preservation Award

Could you imagine the U.S. Capitol without the Statue of Freedom atop the Dome? What if the birds and the flowers in the Brumidi Corridors had been painted over with a nice shade of taupe? And, what if Thomas U. Walter's 1859 cross-section drawing of the Capitol dome and Rotunda had been tossed in the trash?



Thanks to the AOC Curator Division, these scenarios won't ever become reality. Each day they care for and preserve the many artistic treasures in the Capitol, housed in various office buildings, and displayed on the grounds of Capitol Hill. They also keep detailed records on these assets and document the numerous projects carried out by the AOC.

Recently, their herculean efforts were recognized by the Heritage Preservation and the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works as the winner of the 2010 Award for Outstanding Commitment to the Preservation and Care of Collections.

The annual award is presented to an organization that has been "exemplary

The AOC was selected as a “Model of Exemplary Stewardship of Historic Collections”

in the importance and priority it has given to conservation concerns and in the sustained commitment it has shown to the preservation and care of cultural property.”

“This national award recognizes the extent to which the Architect of the Capitol serves as a national model for what such an accomplished caretaker can do to sustain its collections,” said Meg Loew Craft, president of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, and Mervin Richard, chairperson of Heritage Preservation, in a joint statement.

They also noted that the selection committee was extremely impressed that the AOC has made stewardship one of its core values and that preservation of heritage assets is part of the agency’s overall mission.

“Because the Capitol is such a public building, maintaining and preserving the heritage assets can, at times, be a challenge,” said Dr. Barbara Wolanin, AOC curator. “I am very thankful for the dedicated and professional staff in my division who conduct research, document our projects and events with photographs and architectural drawings, and maintain our archives. I also appreciate all the AOC staff who support our efforts with a wide range of services, and the work of expert

conservators who assisted us in cleaning and restoring the fine art in our nation’s Capitol.”

Over the years, the AOC Curator Division has managed major conservation projects across the Capitol campus, including the 1993 restoration of the Statue of Freedom, the conservation of the Apotheosis of Washington and frieze in the Rotunda, the ongoing conservation of the murals in the Brumidi Corridors, the restoration of the murals in the Library of Congress Thomas Jefferson Building, and the cleaning and preservation of the 100 statutes in the National Statuary Hall Collection.

Each year more than 3,000 drawings are processed and preserved in the AOC’s archives. AOC records management staff process, index, and store construction records and designs in order to document projects taking place in Congressional facilities and across Capitol Grounds. Professional AOC photographers document every construction, renovation, or restoration project that occurs on Capitol Hill and record significant historic events, such as state funerals and presidential inaugurations, as well as maintain a photo archive that includes the first-known photograph of the construction of the Capitol dome.



“For more than two hundred years, AOC employees have worked to preserve and protect the national treasures entrusted to our care. They use their unique skills to preserve these irreplaceable buildings, works of art, photographs and documents,” noted Architect of the Capitol Stephen T. Ayers, AIA, LEED AP. “With a large and varied inventory of historic resources under our care, the ingenuity and talents of our employees are called upon daily. Receiving this recognition for our efforts to maintain and preserve our nation’s heritage assets is a wonderful honor.”

—*Eva Malecki*

Meet the **Architect**

Photos by: Chuck Badal





On May 12, 2010, Stephen T. Ayers, AIA, LEED AP, was officially confirmed and appointed as the 11th Architect of the Capitol. Mr. Ayers had served as Acting Architect since February 2007. Mr. Ayers sat down with *Foundations and Perspectives* to outline some of his first thoughts as the new Architect of the Capitol.

May 12
2010
Senate
unanimously
confirmed
Stephen T. Ayers
Architect of the
Capitol

F&P: Why did you seek to become the Architect of the Capitol?

Mr. Ayers: First and foremost, I love this organization. I love it because of the unbelievably warm and talented people. This job brings together my passions for public service, architecture and history; making this the perfect position for me.

What do you hope most to accomplish?

We have a lot on our plate, a lot of things we need to do—but we are on a great trajectory right now—and we need to keep it going. In order to do this we need to communicate, communicate, communicate—with each other, with the Congress, with the public and our industry partners. We are going to be realistic in our promises and we are going to over-deliver on them.

But I can't do this alone. I am not the "power broker" of the AOC. The real power lies in each of our employees, they are the face of the agency and they are on the front lines interacting with Members of Congress and their staff everyday. Enabling their accomplishments, empowering and shaping their interactions, and celebrating their success are what I hope most to accomplish.

The bottom line is that I am here to enable our employees to do their jobs effectively, to be seen as an honest communicator to Congress and our employees, and ensure we have the vision and the resources to achieve our goals together.

What are your first priorities?

My first priority is taking care of our employee's safety, health and well-being. Our employees do the hard work around here and we need to care for them in every way possible. In my three years as the Acting Architect we were able to do many of the things that I felt were most important, including improving our workforce benefits and flexibilities.

This includes development of a student loan repayment program, establishing flexible schedules, telework, and fitness center benefits to name a few.

Establishing exceptional, transparent and trustworthy relationships with our employees, our Unions, and the Congress are also my first priorities.

What are your long term priorities?

We have some big issues to tackle—over a billion dollars in deferred maintenance and capital renewal work. We also have a couple big projects in the future, the Cannon House Office Building renovation—the biggest job in our history—and how we plan and execute that work is going to be a major focus for the next five to ten years.

We are also about to tackle the Capitol dome and will be stripping it down to its bare bones and the entire nation will be watching—we need to be timely and accountable in that project as well.

We need to be focused on completing the Capitol Complex Master Plan that

“This job brings together my passions for public service, architecture and history; making this the perfect position for me.”

serves as a roadmap for where we need to be twenty years from now. We need to predict problems now, so we can take steps to plan and address them well ahead of time.

What are the most important attributes you need to be successful?

Communication, communication, communication is the key to success. We need to communicate internally with each other, externally with our oversight and the Congress, and with the American public.

We need to be accountable, which means we need to measure everything we do and continually elevate ourselves and ensure we continually improve—we can't let good get in the way of great.

What do you want AOC employees to most know about you?

I care deeply about all of them. I respect them and am proud to be part of their team. I truly believe in communication, communication, and communication. Stop me in the hall, call me, e-mail me—I get such a charge out of the input from feedback sessions I regularly host. I get fantastic energy from these meetings and get inspired to do better.

What do you think is the AOC's greatest strength?

The power is in our people. This group of 2,600 employees—every single one of them knows where they are and knows the awesome responsibility we have in caring for the most iconic buildings in the world. They all get it—that we must serve with distinction and exceed expectations everyday.

What do you think is the AOC's greatest challenge? How will it be overcome?

We have lots of challenges—probably the toughest is how we prioritize our efforts. How do we handle the Cannon House Office Building Renovation, the largest in our history? How do we prevent and recover from a terrorist attack? How do we implement and achieve our energy goals?

The answer to all these challenges is that we have the skills, we have the tools, and we have the resources. But we must better communicate and collaborate with each other and with the Congress to get it done.

Can you tell me a little about how your career brought you here?

I am a public servant at heart. When I graduated from architecture school, I went into the U.S. Air Force and

was fortunate enough to be in a civil engineering squadron enabling me to get the experience necessary to attain my architecture license in California. I then went into private practice, after which I ended up with the Voice of America and had the great opportunity to work in Greece. My family and I spent six years in Greece and we traveled extensively throughout Europe and it was a wonderful experience.

But we missed the States, we missed family, so I came upon an opening at the AOC, and was hired as the Assistant Senate Superintendent, from there I became Library Superintendent, and then Chief Operating Officer and most recently Acting Architect—in total I have been here about 13 years.

Any moment you particularly remember in your 13 years at the AOC?

I remember the events of 2001 when I was serving in the Senate and especially the herculean efforts of our team to reestablish the Senate within days after the Anthrax attacks. I was one of those on Cipro, and I remember leaving the building having to remove my clothes and putting on a PPE jump suit to go home. I clearly remember walking into my house wearing the PPE suit and my wife looking at me with a “what-on-earth-did-you-do” look on her face.

Doric, Ionic or Corinthian?

That’s easy. Corinthian, you take the best of the best and mix it together and see what you get. That’s the Capitol in a nutshell.



Three generations of Architects of the Capitol: Stephen T. Ayers (present), George M. White (1971-1995), Alan Hantman (1997-2007).

What do you do to relax?

Relax? What’s that? I do like to read, play golf, and go to the beach. But I am not wired like that, I don’t really like to relax—I prefer to get things done, that to me is relaxing.

What is the most fun about this job?

Working with people is fun—I love interacting with our employees and with oversight committees. Also, as a leader, when you see people on your team grow and flourish—that is fun.

Any architect modern or historic you particularly admire?

Benjamin Henry Latrobe is an inspiration to me and of course, the Thomas U. Walter Capitol dome is marvelous. In the broader field of architecture, I particularly admire Hugh Newell Jacobsen and David

Jameson, their architecture is clean and elegant. Also I enjoy the work of the Greene and Greene brothers, their designs are very delicate—they are all about details and details are important to me.

Finally, is there anything you most want AOC employees to know about how you will serve in this role?

Some managers say, “you work for me,” but I say, “I work for you.” I serve employees and make sure that they have the right tools and resources to do their jobs.

That is my view of leadership. I will do what I can to take care of their needs, so they can take of their customers and together we will create a successful future.

Under Grounds: The E Street Garage Band



Photos by: Chuck Badal

Blooming cherry trees, tulips, magnificent oaks and magnolias—these are the images conjured when thinking of the Capitol grounds. However, there is another side to the Capitol grounds, one that looks a little different—but is just as beautiful—especially if you like big jobs, big trucks and digging in the dirt.

“I love operating equipment.”

This is a place where you’re unlikely to see many butterflies or a lot of pastel colors—this is a place where words like compacting, blades, grading, grinding and power take precedence.

“I love operating equipment,” says Frank Long, 23-year veteran of the

AOC. “Especially the backhoe [John Deere 410-G, 4X4 backhoe with three-in-one bucket on front and 18 foot extend-a-hoe 24 inch bucket on back]. I am more comfortable in that than anything. It’s the most versatile and I can do more work with it—grading, digging, lifting. It’s got 4x4 and it can dig up to 18 feet deep.”

Welcome to the E Street Garage, where a band of ten men like Frank—who like digging in the dirt with big trucks—are the norm.

Frank Bussler, heavy equipment operator, and his colleagues keep some of the AOC's biggest machines running smoothly.



Welcome to the E Street Garage, where a band of ten men like Frank—who like digging in the dirt with big trucks—are the norm; and where the “boss” with nearly three decades of experience is a junior member of the team.

The Capitol Grounds Maintenance Division includes 22 individuals comprising three shops: automotive and small engine; plumbing; and masonry. The Maintenance Division is primarily responsible for supporting the Capitol Grounds Gardening Division through managing a fleet of nearly 40 vehicles, including front-end loaders and backhoes, and more than 200 pieces of small equipment, such as mowers and chainsaws; conducting irrigation and sewer maintenance and installations; and preserving the Capitol grounds historic hardscape features such as the Olmsted walls and walks.

Wayne West is the general supervisor of the Capitol Grounds Maintenance Division, and though he is the “boss” of the E Street band with 28 ½ years in the AOC, he is still a junior member of the team. The senior dean of this group is Charlton Lewis with an astounding 48-year AOC tenure. Charlton heads one of the most important day-to-day operations

of the Maintenance Division, the collection of garbage from across the Capitol and recyclables at the Capitol Visitor Center.

Operating the AOC garbage truck and ensuring the grounds of the Capitol are clean since 1962, Charlton collected more than 9,000 tons of waste from the Capitol grounds during his tenure (including 182.5 tons in just the past seven months)—the equivalent of personally cleaning-up after more than 120 Super Bowls.

His team is comprised of himself and two materials handlers who do the climbing in and out of the truck hundreds of times a week; this includes the newest E Street member, Deonte Lane, with just a few months on Charlton’s truck.

“Just glad to be part of the team,” said Deonte.

Asked about the biggest change in 48 years—Charlton lifts his foot commenting, “This was the compactor when I began. I have two good material handlers right now though.”

Adds Deonte, “Packing with your feet...I don’t think I could have done that.”

“It wasn’t easy,” said Charlton.

Today, Charlton drives a brand new state-of-the-art 250 HP, 33,000 pound, 16-cubic yard compactor truck, with a six-speed automatic transmission and Leach compactor body with air brakes and features such as power adjustable mirrors, power-assisted can lift, back-up camera and an activation alarm to notify the driver to turn on the compactor.



Ronnie Neal, mason supervisor, digs in the dirt to help conduct repairs to the roads around the Capitol.

Even with this new high-tech equipment, collecting garbage is not a clean business, and the crew has seen everything one can imagine might be found in the garbage of public parks. But what is the most unusual thing they have seen?

“You might find anything...I am going to tell you the truth, anything...,” said Charlton, pausing to consider the question. “Motor oil. Now... who could bring some motor oil to the Visitor Center?”

Will he stay on for another 48 years? “As long as I can walk,” said Charlton.

Beyond the trash collection, another role of the Capitol Grounds Maintenance Division is operating the heavy equipment. This includes

equipment like the Bobcat Versi-handler 4X4 all wheel steer material handler capable of lifting 5,000 pounds 16 feet high; a Case Loader 521 DXT with clam bucket, 3-in-1 bucket and a set of forks (for handling materials), articulating steering; and A-300 Bobcat mini-loaders with multiple attachments, including snow blowers and a 36” auger for setting up the Capitol Christmas tree.

They use this equipment for jobs such as installing fire hydrants and backflow preventers that include laying 8-inch pipe, 20 feet long, 20 feet below the surface around the Capitol grounds that include a maze of wires, plumbing, and tunnels; some marked—some not—and some nearly 200 years old.

“We do whatever it takes to get the job done.”

“There is plenty of stuff buried in the ground up here,” said Wayne.

Frank Long adds, “It is pretty neat. I remember working on the Senate side on the west front, digging down more than 20 feet and found a cobble stone roadway—still hard like they just laid it.”

Under the direction of Robert Somerville, AOC automotive shop foreman, five automotive mechanics repair and maintain the Capitol Grounds Division trucks and heavy equipment. The mechanics perform a 27-point road worthiness inspection for the AOC’s entire 130 vehicle fleet to ensure employees are safe.

The garage also literally fuels the AOC, operating a fuel station that supplies E85 to the AOC fleet and several other legislative branch organizations. E85 is the term for motor fuel that is a blend of 85 percent ethanol and just 15 percent gasoline. E85 is an alternative fuel that burns cleaner than gasoline and is completely renewable and domestically produced.

Outside the garage, the team is also responsible for more than eight lane miles of roads and 17 acres of parking lot. This includes snow removal where the team’s objective is to plow down to pavement within 24 hours of a snowfall. A job made difficult



Deonte Lane and Quinn Latta team up along with Charlton Lewis (cover) to keep the grounds clean everyday.

Ultimately the hard work of the Maintenance Division of Capitol Grounds is manifested by what you don't see.

when two blizzards hit back-to-back in February of 2010 but they worked around the clock and cleared the Capitol.

Ultimately the hard work of the Maintenance Division of Capitol Grounds is manifested by what you don't see—garbage is removed, water mains flow properly, and walks and paths are maintained year-round.

The collective service of the Capitol Grounds Maintenance Division helps keep a functional and beautiful place for all who work on and visit the Capitol.

As Wayne concludes, “We do whatever it takes to get the job done.”

—*Matt Guilfoyle*



Robert Somerville inspects an AOC fleet vehicle, conducting such safety inspections is one key role the garage plays.



Photos by: Dewitt Roseborough

The Architect of the Capitol, *Working for You*

The objective is to create a culture centered around the well-being of employees.

Juggling work, relationships and personal responsibilities can be overwhelming, but with the help of the expanding Architect of the Capitol Work/Life Program, employees are given options and tools to help manage and relieve the escalating challenges confronting all of us today.

To aid you in leading a healthy lifestyle, the AOC's current work/life offerings include: the Flexible Work Schedule Program, Fitness Club Benefits, Financial Planning Seminars, and monthly focus programs such as

Asthma Awareness, Annual Health and Wellness Fair, and Telework Program.

Lisa Maltbie, AOC work/life specialist, explains that, "the overarching goal and purpose of the programs is to build a resilient AOC workforce in

which employees are empowered to make informed decisions about their health and wellness. Every employee should have the tools to be successful and have the tools to recover more readily from an adversity such as an illness, injury, or loss.”

With that in mind, the programs are designed to provide flexibility for managers, supervisors and employees alike to assist in daily balancing of work and personal responsibilities. The objective is to create a culture centered around the well-being of employees, because as the Agency’s greatest asset, the success of the agency is directly tied to individuals like you.

“I think the establishment of the telework program is one of the AOC’s most exciting initiatives in recent years,” said John C. Ward, associate general counsel, a participant in the telework program. “It establishes the AOC as a model for how employers, and specifically government agencies, can operate more efficiently and still provide the same, or even better, service. It is also nice to see the AOC taking the lead in environmental sustainability and reducing its carbon footprint, and telework is part of that—it makes you all the more proud to be an AOC employee.”

In order to promote Mr. Ayers’s vision of the AOC as an employer of choice, Maltbie points out that, “it is essential to offer workplace flexibilities. We are facing a human capital crisis across the federal government, and competition for talented employees

“The establishment of the telework program is one of the AOC’s most exciting initiatives in recent years.”

is high, especially with the private sector.”

Maltbie says she has had “conversations with counterparts at other agencies, and because of the lack of senior management support and resources, their wellness programs have stalled. In comparison, from the inception of the programs, Architect of the Capitol Stephen T. Ayers, and the other AOC senior managers, have been very supportive.”

“Mr. Ayers recognized early on the importance of integrating work/life programs with the business objectives of the Agency,” adds Maltbie. “The traditional office environment, a relic of the industrial business model, is no longer effective in attracting and retaining today’s generation of workers. There are advantages in investing in employees’ health and well-being. A healthier workforce is more productive, performs higher quality of work and has higher morale.”

According to Maltbie, the results are evident, “for the Agency and employee, the key tangible and intangible benefits of providing work/life incentives are employee commitment, job satisfaction, increased productivity, and operational efficiency.”

To learn more, visit the Work/Life page on AOCLink at <http://aochome.aoc.gov/hr/worklife.cfm>, contact Lisa Maltbie at 226-6595, or stop by Room 277, Ford House Office Building.

—*Sballey Kim*



Lisa Maltbie discusses ideas with Piney Milline and Eleanor Shields.

Do **YOUR** Part for the Economy—

AOC Small Business Program Creates *Opportunity*



Photo: National Archives

June 6, 1944—a 5,000-vessel armada stretched as far as the eye could see, transporting more than 150,000 men and nearly 30,000 vehicles across the English Channel to the beaches of France—the largest amphibious invasion in history. At the center of these Allied landings, in one of the most critical battles of World War II, was the “Higgins boat.”

“Its just plain economics—it’s good to support small business.”

The Marine Corps, interested in finding better ways to get troops across a beach in an amphibious landing, and frustrated that the Bureau of Construction and Repair could not meet its requirements, became interested in the Higgins boat.

Ultimately, more than 20,000 of the landing craft designed by Andrew

Higgins were built based on boats made for operating in swamps and marshes of Louisiana. This small businessman and entrepreneur employed, at his peak, 30,000 workers. He paid top wages to an integrated work force of both gender and race, the first ever in New Orleans.

The ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit of small businesses such as Higgins helped win World War II.

“He is the man who won the war for us,” said General Dwight Eisenhower. “If Higgins had not designed and built those [boats], we never could have landed over an open beach. The whole strategy of the war would have been different.”

The ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit of small businesses such as Higgins helped win World War II. Following the World War II mobilization effort, the federal government looked at how it managed to produce what was needed. And, even though the major items such as ships and tanks were delivered by large business, most of the parts came from small business.

Today, the Architect of the Capitol continues in this spirit of capturing the ingenuity and entrepreneurialism of American small businesses, along with the practical business need of cultivating a broad base of suppliers.

“It’s a capacity issue. It is better to have a broad base supply—it’s easier to ramp-up. Let’s say you only have once source for a part and the plant is on a river that floods—you no longer have the part,” said Lisa Russell, AOC small business coordinator. “However, if you have suppliers around the country, even if you are buying only small quantities, if one plant is affected then your entire supply chain isn’t disrupted.”

“It’s just plain economics—it’s good to support small business,” said Cynthia Bennett, director of AOC procurement.

For all these reasons, Stephen T. Ayers, architect of the Capitol, directed the AOC Procurement Division to develop a small business program with the assistance of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). The program began October 1, 2009, setting-aside small purchases between \$5,000 and \$100,000 for small business concerns. The program draws on the existing structure of the SBA’s regulations, and the SBA is providing support for this initiative.

Since October 2009, the AOC procurement office has already surpassed some of the goals of the program and continues to work hard to educate both AOC employees and small businesses about the program. This included a successful industry day at the Capitol Visitor Center that was well attended by the business community. The Procurement Office has also held 14 training and education outreach programs and plans for more outreach in the months ahead.

Anyone interested in learning more about the program can visit www.aoc.gov or contact Lisa Russell at (202) 226-1407 or smallbusiness@aoc.gov.

—Matt Guilfoyle

Lisa Russell and her colleagues in the Procurement Office are determined to cultivate robust small business programs.



Photo by: Dewitt Roseborough

Facts about Small Businesses

- There are an estimated 27.2 million small businesses in America.
- More than half of Americans either own or work for a small business.
- Small businesses create two of every three new jobs and employ about half of the nation’s private sector work force.
- Half of the nation’s nonfarm and private real gross domestic product (GDP) is produced by small businesses.
- Since 2003, America’s small business exports have grown about 80%. They now account for nearly \$500 billion in annual sales.

FROM Army to Architect

Benjamin Wilson



Photos: Courtesy Benn Wilson

Benjamin Wilson didn't hesitate to enlist in the U.S. Army. At age 17 he joined the delayed entry program and by age 18 he had arrived at Ft. Leonard Wood in Missouri to begin basic training. His life was on a much different path then. Little did he know that just six years later he would be studying blueprints of the U.S. Capitol on his way to becoming an architect.

After completing training, Benn was based at Ft. Stewart, Georgia, for a year before he was called to Iraq. There he served a full tour for a year as a combat engineer. After the completion of his tour, Benn returned to Ft. Stewart until his contract with the Army was up... except the Army still needed him. He was called back to Iraq on Stop Loss—an order by the military preventing members from separating from the service during wartime.

Benn returned to Iraq as team leader and gunner for a Bradley (an infantry fighting vehicle). He was only there a month when his Bradley rolled over an IED (improvised explosive device) that took out his entire vehicle. His driver and platoon sergeant were killed in the explosion and Benn sustained massive injuries, including: four broken vertebrae, a broken ankle and knee, mild traumatic brain injury, and lacerations on his forehead, chin and knee.

Benn spent the next year at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC. He was recovering and contemplating what to do when he returned to civilian life.

“Originally, I had wanted to get into carpentry,” said Benn, “but I realized the physical labor needed would be difficult after the injuries I sustained in combat.”



Benn Wilson served the U.S. Army in Iraq before coming to the Architect of the Capitol, through Operation Warfighter, to learn about a career in architecture.

Operation Warfighter aims to provide meaningful temporary Federal work assignments to these wounded warriors.



So Benn considered careers that would satisfy his interest in construction but be less labor intensive. Soon his thoughts turned to architecture.

Through Operation Warfighter—a program for severely wounded service men and women who are in the process of recovery at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and administered by the Department of Defense—Benn was placed with the Architect of the Capitol in 2008 for a few weeks during April and May. Operation Warfighter aims to provide meaningful temporary federal work assignments to these wounded warriors. The goal is to assist them

in regaining their confidence and leadership skills and help them transition from the Army back into the workforce. The AOC has hosted five veterans in positions throughout the agency, working in architecture, IT, quality control, carpentry and photography.

“Participation in the Operation Warfighter Program was a terrific way for the AOC to show our appreciation for our veterans and give back in a small way,” said Anna Franz, director, Planning and Project Management. “Benn’s enthusiasm during his time with us was a true inspiration—he will be a tremendous addition to the architecture community.”

While at the AOC Benn visited project sites and shadowed different AOC architects and engineers, including Robert Mitrocsak, jurisdiction executive for the Capitol Power Plant and Security Programs with the Planning and Project Management Division, and a fellow former combat

engineer who was once attached to Benn’s division.

He also viewed blueprints to help find solutions to problems such as upgrading building codes, placing security lamps or placing exterior barriers to keep potential threats away from the buildings.

“Going around with the architects and engineers to all the sites made me realize that an architect does much more than sit at the computer drawing. I enjoyed being on-site and getting to walk around,” said Benn.

Benn was particularly intrigued by AOC’s unique work in restoration and preservation architecture.

“It was almost like being an archeologist in the architecture world,” remarked Benn.

Benn’s time with the Architect of the Capitol inspired him to enroll in Ball State University’s architecture program, where he recently completed his first year.

“Everything I did at the Capitol helped me to realize that I wanted to be an architect... If all architecture is as hands-on and involved as at the Capitol, then I know I will love being an architect.”

—Lori Westley



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Susanne Bledsoe, AOC photographer, earlier this spring lifted 150 feet in the air to take shots of the buildings around Capitol Square.



Photo by: Michael Dunn