

NCMCA Golden Anniversary Celebration Series – September 2024

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We're celebrating the North Carolina Masonry Contractors Association Golden 50th Anniversary Year by highlighting some monumental events that have taken place throughout the existence of NCMCA. Each month throughout 2024 we will have articles that will showcase the history and folks that helped NCMCA get to where it is today. Please enjoy this yearlong series with our ninth article, "Introducing Future Designers to Masonry"

NCMCA always promotes masonry as the building material of choice and as a great career opportunity. But in most respects, NCMCA has left the marketing of masonry products to the manufacturers with the masons stepping in to boost the manufacturers' campaigns whenever it has been possible to do so. Many NCMCA contractor members worked tirelessly lobbying for the concrete masonry industry's CMU Check-Off Program. In turn, NCMCA has taken the lead in promoting masonry careers and workforce development in North Carolina with the manufacturers regularly stepping in with financial and other support of NCMCA workforce development initiatives. This is especially true after NCMCA's 2018 commitment to hiring and maintaining a fulltime training and workforce development coordinator. Masonry material manufacturers and suppliers have been generous with their pledges supporting NCMCA workforce development and recruitment.

However, NCMCA has maintained one very successful program dedicated to maintaining and expanding masonry's share of the building material market. Since 2001, the NCMCA Sigmon Memorial Masonry Design Scholarship has provided a positive and impactful introduction to masonry for university students headed for careers as architects, engineers, and designers. It does so by awarding scholarship tuition prizes to students who successfully participate in masonry design competitions that are graded assignments at the North Carolina State University College of Design, at the Appalachian State University College of Fine and Applied Arts, and soon, at East Carolina University.

Dwayne and Helen Sigmon created the Randy Sigmon Memorial Scholarship. Helen

Sigmon writes, “Memories are hard. After the death of our son Randy D. Sigmon on January 5, 1991 at the age of eighteen, with a lot of thought, both Dwayne and I knew we needed to keep his memory alive with something special. The Randy Sigmon Memorial Scholarship was the answer.

“Randy was learning to be a master brick mason with the help of his father Dwayne E. Sigmon. Dwayne always took pride in his work and was involved in NCMCA. He even won the first ‘Fastest Trowel’ contest at Wrightsville Beach.

“We felt the scholarship would help other young people interested in pursuing a career in masonry. So on April 20, 1991 at a meeting in Wilmington, NC with then Governor Bob Scott, who presented a plaque to Dwayne, the Randy Sigmon Memorial Scholarship officially was created. A special moment for sure.

“All this was with the help from dear Eleanor Upton who helped us so much.

“After the passing of Dwayne’s brother David in 1998 and later with Dwayne’s passing in 2004, the name of the scholarship was changed to ‘The Sigmon Memorial Scholarship’ to memorialize all three of them. Dwayne and David believed in NCMCA, were always involved with many moving parts of the organization, and served in the Association’s local and state leadership. They both knew the importance of NCMCA for our state, keeping the standards high and giving guidance to each member.” David was NCMCA’s President-Elect at the time of his passing.

When the Sigmon Scholarship was initiated, the awards were designated for students in masonry vocational programs at North Carolina community colleges. At the suggestion of NCMCA past president Doug Burton, the NCMCA board later repurposed the scholarship as a tool to encourage architectural students to learn and appreciate masonry. In the fall of 2001, the first Sigmon Memorial Scholarship Masonry Design Competition was conducted at the North Carolina State University School of Design.

Folks in the industry have often referred to NC State Professor of Architecture J. Patrick Rand as “The Professor of Masonry.” Now retired, Professor Rand has conducted extensive research on masonry best practices and has written several books on the subject. He is a past president of The Masonry Society (TMS) and for many

years partnered with various concrete masonry and brick manufacturing promotional groups to provide opportunities for architectural students to interact with the masonry industry. Professor Rand worked closely with Doug Burton to develop the Sigmon design competition as a graded assignment for his “Architectural Construction Systems” class. Rand says, “Architecture students never really know how to use any material just by reading textbooks and listening to lectures. They need to design using these materials, making the learning personal and long lasting. In this project, the next generation of architects design the front wall of a hypothetical masonry building, which they draw, model (at a scale big enough to include the flashing and anchors), and sometimes even build mockups at full scale. The principles of masonry design and construction come alive in these projects. Students never forget these principles.

“More than any other construction system, masonry requires that many little things be done correctly, by the designer and by the craftsperson who builds it. The Sigmon Memorial Scholarships support young designers as they engage the craft of the masonry wall. In this two to three week project, more than one-thousand undergraduate and graduate students have shown remarkable insight regarding masonry construction, a system they formerly found confusing and even scary. They become architects with a head start at producing beautiful masonry designs that can also be well built. North Carolina is considered the nation’s leader regarding masonry manufacturing and construction. We find this project helps us also lead the way regarding masonry design.”

In 2011, the design scholarship program expanded to the Building Sciences program and College of Fine and Applied Arts at Appalachian State University as a graded assignment for the Architectural Design Studio class thanks to ASU Professor D. Jason Miller. As a student in 2001, Professor Miller was himself a participant/contestant in the first NC State Sigmon Memorial Scholarship Design Competition. Professor Miller says, “I first encountered the Sigmon Memorial Scholarship competition as a student. A student on a team of three students (shout-out to Noah Morris and Matthew Pavelchak) that placed and earned the Crick level prize. Pat Rand is right (as he so often is): I still remember the design concept and detailing strategies and constructed coordination of our entry as part of his course. (And I still give Doug Burton a hard time about not winning the top prize.)

“When I began working in the Building Sciences program at Appalachian State, I knew this competition represented the perfect opportunity: To teach design fundamentals and principles through construction means and methods. Now entering its fifteenth cycle at App State, the Sigmon Memorial Scholarship remains a staple project in our design studios and a steadfast example of connecting industry and education professionals to appreciate, celebrate, and advance the possibilities of masonry materials and products.”

Participating students usually work in teams of two to three who produce detailed models, drawings, and narratives that are graded by school faculty for such aspects as creativity, quality of the work, and the apparent amount of research completed by the students. In addition to receiving a grade for the class work, the displayed projects are judged by “outsiders” to determine which teams will receive Sigmon design competition recognition. The “outside” juror team usually consists of one or two NCMCA contactor members and a practicing architect who work together to determine the winners of the competition, often having to ultimately compromise to reach a consensus because bricklayers and architects sometimes have different criteria for determining the merit of a project’s design. For the same reason, occasionally the project with the highest faculty grade might not necessarily receive the highest score from the competition judges.

When the judges are done with their scoring, students and faculty are brought together to hear a critique of the projects from both the craftsman’s point of view and from the architect’s perspective, and to learn who wins the contest. The critique by masonry industry professionals is one of the top reasons the Sigmon Scholarship is such an important opportunity for the masonry industry.

Each year, the winning team splits a semester’s tuition as their prize. Traditionally, the second place finishers each receive a four-foot Crick level (like Professor Miller,) the third place team receives Rose trowels, and fourth place each receive a folding modular spacing rule.

In a letter sent to NCMCA after the first competition, 2001 first place team member Daniel Moskop confirmed that the criteria for the Sigmon Scholarship would help accomplish the goal of promoting masonry to future designers when he wrote, “...the idea that masons and architects alike felt that our design was an innovative use of

masonry was very rewarding. ...I would like to express my appreciation for the award, and your objective to challenge students to study masonry construction in greater depth.”

Now an associate at Gensler in Raleigh, a global architecture, design, and planning firm, Ana Bronson was on the 2009 NC State winning team and says, “Participating in the competition taught me to appreciate the inherent strengths of materials. It inspired me to think creatively about how to use materials to produce beautiful results, highlighting their qualities through thoughtful details and implementing them in unique ways to reinforce design concepts.”

This fall, the scholarship program will expand to East Carolina University. NCMCA President-Elect Tim Manning says, “The conversation started when David McQueen, Eastern Carolina Chapter President Bryan Overman, and myself met with ECU. The purpose was twofold. First, we wanted to let them know that we want a stronger connection with their construction management and engineering programs. David and I have always been involved with the Southeast Concrete Masonry Association’s (SCMA) university ‘BlockFest’ programs but we want to forge a stronger relationship. Through those discussions, it became apparent that the best way to show our sincerity was to consider offering a scholarship. We were fully prepared to offer a semester scholarship through the Eastern Carolina Chapter alone. Ryan Shaver suggested we just expand the Sigmon Scholarship to include ECU and hopefully in the near future, at UNC-Charlotte as well. So, I have had several meetings with ECU department chairs and faculty to discuss the scholarship, the implementation, award, and funding. I’m happy to report \$3,750 (the cost of tuition for one semester) will be awarded to the student who achieves the highest marks on the assigned project. Each student who completes course *3010-Construction Modeling and Information Technology* will receive a link to compete for the scholarship. The department has a review board established. Industry professionals including myself will sit on that board. This will go in effect this semester. The first scholarship will be awarded around January. The Eastern Carolina Chapter plans to make an annual contribution to the endowment once it is established.”

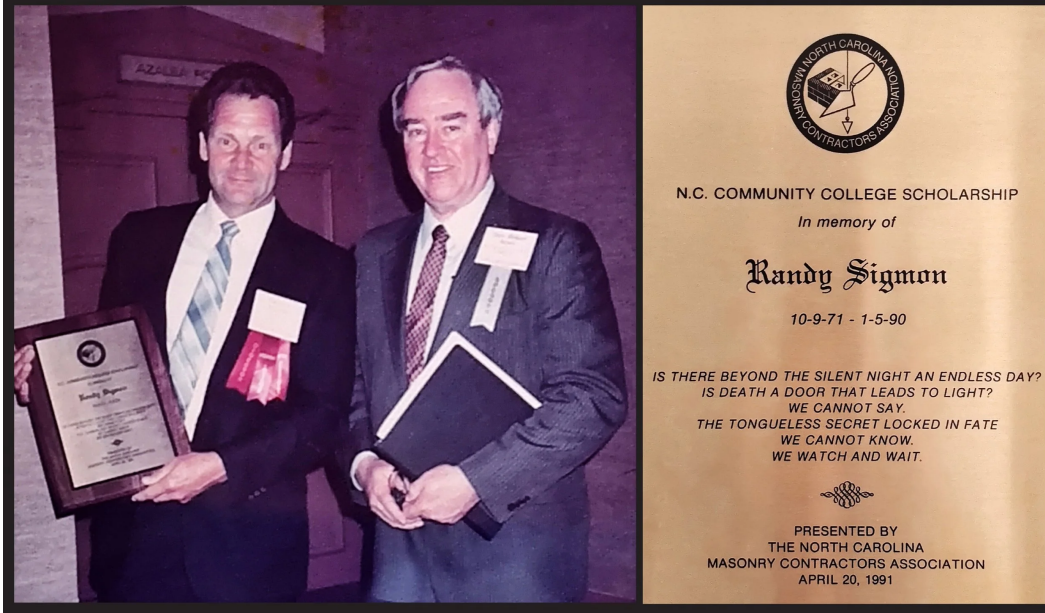
The Sigmon Memorial Scholarship’s major funding is from the NCMCA Annual Fall Golf Tournament. Additional financial support comes from the Sigmon Family, from NCMCA memorial contributions, and from individual donations.

In partnership with the university programs of the SCMA and other masonry manufacturing groups, NCMCA's Sigmon Memorial Scholarship Program is a very effective means to ensure future designers have a positive collegiate introduction to masonry. Doug Burton explains, "We have helped introduce masonry to all of these students who are and will soon be out in the workforce. Because of the design competition and scholarship, they have more familiarity with our products, our associations and our systems. We make them aware of the resources they have going forward with NCMCA as well as BIASE/BIA and SCMA/NCMA, which are all there to help in design and construction. We make sure they know we are a 10,000-year-old craft that has stood the test of time and will continue to do so. We are local and we are very affordable upfront and our maintenance costs are minimal if not nonexistent. Not only are we an attractive veneer but also a load bearing structure if needed.

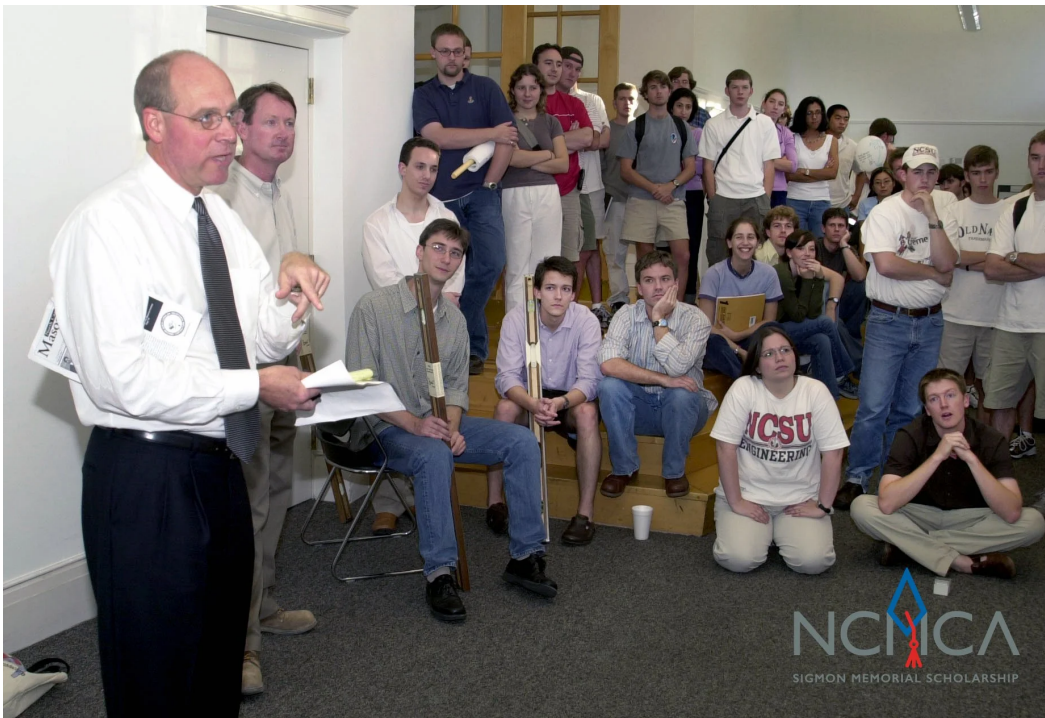
"In our years of doing this competition, we have reached more than 1,000 future architects and 500 future construction professionals, making them more aware and comfortable with masonry, which helps our industry in getting our product designed and installed. We have contributed over \$125,000 to these students which has been very successful over the years in advancing masonry construction."

Helen Sigmon says, "I am so proud of the good The Sigmon Memorial Scholarship has given to each recipient of the scholarship prize. Let's keep it going for years to come. I look forward each year to seeing who is awarded the honor. It is amazing how talented these young students are. I can't wait to see what they design next!"

Article by Lynn Nash



Dwayne Sigmon, left, receives a plaque from then North Carolina Governor Bob Scott to inaugurate The Sigmon Memorial Scholarship in 1991.



Competition judges Raleigh architect Roger Cannon (left) and NCMCA's Doug Burton provide project critiques to the participants in the first

Sigmon Memorial Scholarship Design Competition at NC State in 2001. Appalachian State Professor Jason Miller, then an NC State student, is in the lavender shirt seated on the first row holding his second place prize, a Crick level. Professor Miller would bring the competition to Appalachian State in 2011.



Left to right, The NC State team of Erika Jolleys, Ana Milliones Bronson, and Rebecca Hora claimed the 2009 Sigmon Memorial Scholarship Masonry Design Award and shared a semester's in-state tuition as their prize. Erika Jolleys was also the recipient of the 2009 Carolina Concrete Masonry Association's J. Patrick Rand Scholarship Award based on her performance in the NCMCA Sigmon competition and in the earlier CCMA wall design competition.



Left to right, NCMCA's Doug Burton, architect and builder Vinny Petrarca, a principal at Tonic Design | Tonic Construction, and Professor J. Patrick Rand examine a contest model entry for the 2018 NCSU Sigmon Memorial Design Competition.



Left to right, ASU Professor Jason Miller along with NCMCA's Kent Huntley and Bob Gates work to score the entries in the 2018 Appalachian State University Sigmon Memorial Design Competition.



From the 2019 Appalachian State University Sigmon Design Competition, left to right, judges for the competition Chelsea Helms, ASU Assistant Professor of Interior Design; NCMCA President Kent Huntley; winner Delaney Marion; ASU Associate Professor D. Jason Miller, AIA, Program Director of Building Science with daughter Vivian; winner Nolan Markovich; and competition judge Chad Davis of Griffin Masonry.
