



3 June 2014

Dear Members of the Selection Committee,

I am especially psyched to write a letter supporting Ann Sobiech-Munson for the inaugural Emerging Women of Influence Award. The opportunity to write on behalf of mentees and students arises occasionally; the opportunity to write in support of a respected peer is rare. Rarer still, is the opportunity to share with others the experiences I've had with someone who I have shared nearly my entire career. For Ann, her career decisions reveal why she is a woman of influence.

Our careers in architecture started in exactly the same place: Herbert Lewis Kruse Blunck Architecture, a storied design firm in Des Moines. We were interns, working long hours on great projects, earning more responsibility and looking around at the predominance of men at the firm and in our chosen profession. In school, we were in the minority, but not by such extreme margins. Entering architectural practice, we quickly recognized what the demographics show: women depart the profession of architecture at a much faster pace than men.

Ann and I have since taken different paths, but that nagging question remained, "where are all of the women going?" She had a highly regarded career in academia, complete with national awards, publications, and research. She quickly moved in the ranks from department lecturer to director of a college-wide program. She was on the verge of a tenured position, but decided to return to private practice.

She did this, in-part, because of a belief that she could only address the attrition of women in the profession of architecture by engaging directly in the practice of architecture. Immediately upon making the decision to return to architecture practice, she contacted me about her interest in founding a local organization that addressed the issue of women in architecture. She recognized that the timing was right. We had gained enough respect in our time in the profession that we could provide perspective to younger women, knew the few women with more experience in the profession, and begin to ask tough questions of architecture's leaders. She was methodical about founding the group. Because of Ann, Iowa Women in Architecture (iaWia) opened a bank account, has by-laws, is recognized as an official non-profit, and, ultimately, is a respected volunteer organization among our state's professionals and gaining national attention in architecture for our accomplishments. She provided the leadership that gives the group a strong foundation and sense of purpose.

Ann served as iaWia's first chairwoman in 2011-12 and continues to provide leadership to the group by using her impeccable communication skills to author research, make presentations, and write newsletters and press releases. With an established mission "educating communities, empowering individuals, and advancing women in design," in late 2012, the group began an important project to examine work-life balance in the design fields. That project has resulted in a presentation at Iowa's American Institute of Architecture's annual convention and a 100+ page white paper titled, "Best Practice Recommendations for the Design Profession." As a sign of influence, Ann did not create this, but it would not have happened without her. It is the result of two years of programming including a panel discussion, member workshop, speakers, and roundtable discussions and months of hard work by approximate twenty local professionals, all marked by her leadership. Local firm leaders are taking notice, and action that we think will lead to more women in the practice of architecture and in leadership positions.

It was by accident that Ann and I began our careers together, it has been by choice that I have continued to collaborate with this woman of influence. I hope you, too, see how the inspiration and leadership she provides makes her an ideal choice for this inaugural award. Her 'story' is motivating for future emerging women of influence in our community.

Thank you for your consideration!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Erin Olson-Douglas".

Erin Olson-Douglas, AIA