

## CMSS Architects, PC



The 150 West Main Tower provides ten stories of Class A office space and ten stories of parking at the gateway to Norfolk's financial district.

*W*“We have a unique opportunity to shape our environment. Our actions affect what happens 50, 75, and 100 years from now.” That is how Burrell Saunders and John Crouse, founders of CMSS Architects, PC describe the mission of their firm.

Since 1982, CMSS Architects has been shaping the environment of communities throughout Hampton Roads, Virginia, and the United States one project at a time. Founded two decades ago, CMSS Architects has earned a reputation as a leading architectural and planning firm. The company has grown to a staff of 90 and is built on progressive business principles and creative design solutions. Today, the firm is involved in a wide range of projects that are dramatically changing the appearance of the Hampton Roads community.

“Early on, our firm committed to using our profession as a tool to help shape the communities we live in,” Crouse said. “We thought seriously about the effects our actions have on what we leave behind. How could our collective designs have a bigger impact and tie into the broader community?”

Over the years, the firm has evolved to focus on using planning and design skills to accomplish the goals of the community.

“We want to help the community look forward, to think about what they are building toward rather than concentrating on individual projects,” Crouse said.

This community emphasis has led CMSS Architects to the forefront in planning mixed use urban centers. “It is a component of a healthy community to have a dynamic central core. We focus on initiatives that bind the community together, to create environments and places that speak to the community’s need to live, work, learn, interact, socialize, celebrate—everything a community does,” Saunders said.

One highly anticipated project is the City of Virginia Beach’s new main street. Located in the City’s Central Business District, it encompasses more than 17 city blocks. The mixed-use city center has an urban flavor and a sophisticated blend of lifestyles. Features include the best in retail, dining, cultural entertainment, offices, and housing connected by landscaped, brick-paved sidewalks, and open green spaces with fountains. The Virginia Beach Central Business District will draw visitors from every corner of the region and continue the strong economic expansion of the business community.

A 24-story office tower is the focal point of the city center and represents the introduction of high-rise construction in Virginia Beach. “People have asked why we are starting to build vertically,” Saunders said. “The real question is why didn’t we start sooner? We are looking at what is proper stewardship of the land and how we can maximize efficiency.”

The landscape of downtown Norfolk is changing with design work by CMSS Architects. Located at the gateway to downtown Norfolk’s financial district, the 20-story 150 West Main Street Tower creates a stunning architectural statement for the city. The first 10 levels of the building provide 840



Seventeen city blocks are being transformed into Virginia Beach’s new main street, a mixed-use city center with the best retail, dining, cultural entertainment, offices, and housing.

much-needed parking spaces. The top 10 stories contain 234,000 square feet of Class A office space which offer a 360-degree spectacular view of the harbor. Designed with reflective glass, the tower mirrors the surrounding sky, harbor, and cityscape while blending into the architecture of Norfolk's modern business center.

CMSS Architects is having a dramatic impact on residential life in downtown Norfolk. The Heritage at Freemason Harbour is an upscale residential development of 180 apartments that turned a parking lot into a successful rental community. The housing design blends with the Georgian architectural style of the historic Freemason District while brick sidewalks, traditional lighting, and a formal sculpture garden complement the area's historic charm. Retail and specialty stores located at street-level provide residents with the convenience of dining and shopping in their neighborhood.

Located in the same part of town is PierPointe, 72 luxury condominiums on the wharf's edge overlooking the scenic Elizabeth River. The community consists of three four-story buildings, each above a garage. All the condominiums have balconies and a great view of the river. Both The Heritage at Freemason Harbour and PierPointe Condominiums have been highly popular with residents from throughout the Hampton Roads region.

The Oyster Point Town Center is a dynamic project spanning 12 city blocks in Newport News that present an environment of living, working, shopping, and recreation in one central location. Office buildings are located around the Fountain Plaza with water views and a unique central park. Other features include outdoor cafes, restaurants, entertainment venues, retail shops, hotels, and a residential apartment community. The Oyster Point Town Center will be the meeting place on the Virginia Peninsula for business, entertainment, and recreation, a lively urban area that will remain active long after business



The Heritage at Freemason Harbour was designed to blend with the architectural style of Norfolk's historic Freemason District.

hours. It sets the stage for the evolution of the successful Oyster Point Park into the vibrant hub of the Peninsula.

CMSS Architects has received more than 40 national, state and local design awards. Putting past accolades aside, Burrell Saunders and John Crouse continue to focus their firm on the future. "We want to use design as a tool to facilitate the molding and creation of exciting, livable cities, counties, and villages," they said. "We have a real commitment to the community. It's more than building buildings. Our goal is to help personify the community's vision. And we continually work to stay clearly focused on the legacy we will leave behind." •



The Oyster Point Town Center spans 12 city blocks in Newport News and is becoming the vibrant hub of the Virginia Peninsula.