

BUSINESS PROFILE

Architect Chris Lee is up to challenges big and small

BY EVAN WILLIAMS
ewilliams@floridaweekly.com

Christopher J. Lee is most inspired by the infinite combination of design solutions available to him as an architect. And his repertoire of Southwest Florida structures is almost as diverse.

Mr. Lee's seven-member firm handles elaborate commercial building design, like the two-story, 44,500-square-foot Interop Office Building in Fort Myers. They have planned elegant structures such as the Grey Oaks Country Club in Naples, as well as the Lee County YMCA, and an array of surgery centers, condominiums, churches, car dealerships and commercial retail centers.

"Each project has a certain unique element to it," Mr. Lee said. "There are not set, pre-prescribed solutions to any design problem. We're artists, we're technicians, we're tacticians. But we're essentially there to solve problems for our clients. We give the solutions in the physical form — architecture is kind of a physical art. To me, that's what makes architecture interesting."

His firm won four Lee Building Industry Association Awards this year. It was the first time he had applied for the awards, in the 25 years since Mr. Lee started his own firm in Fort Myers.

Some of the projects come with big money, and demand elaborate structures. But Mr. Lee said he appreciates the challenge of working on a tight budget. First, he thinks about how he'll make the building function with the look his client wants.

For example, when he planned Dwyer's

Irish Pub in South Fort Myers (soon to re-open as Icabod's Wicked Good Food & Drink), the concept demanded a specific aesthetic.

"We definitely wanted a facility that spoke to Irish pub," he said.

His team researched pubs and castles in Ireland to create the unique stone building that stands on U.S. 41. It adapted the European design elements to fit Southwest Florida.

"They don't translate straight across," Mr. Lee said.

Finally, there are the constant factors in building — the budget and schedule. Mr. Lee determines if a schedule is realistic. He'll refuse work before rushing to complete a project.

Then he works out the cost.

"Budget is the overriding factor in any design," he said. "But I don't put it as the first item, because within any budget we can be creative and satisfy the client's objectives."

Another specialty is redesigning outdated buildings to lend them a more personable feel. In one outdated North Fort Myers strip mall, damaged in Hurricane Charley, Mr. Lee changed the color, form and proportions on a shoestring budget. It has no architectural intricacy — no embellished columns or intricate lattice. But it does have curbside appeal, making it more attractive to tenants.

"Good buildings can evoke certain responses," he said. "Consciously or unconsciously."

One of Mr. Lee's favorite works is the Estero Fire Station. It was designed to fit in at Coconut Point. The same small design elements are repeated throughout the building like a melody. The walls are set at different levels so the overall shape has "movement."



EVAN WILLIAMS / FLORIDA WEEKLY
Christopher J. Lee

The colors are warm and expressive, befitting Coconut Point's Mediterranean-style architecture.

Some of Mr. Lee's current projects, like the North Fort Myers Fire Station No. 1, will focus on green building technology, an industry trend. But the most significant change in architecture since his career began has been computer aided design and drafting. Still, you have to understand how to draw the designs by hand.

"If you don't understand how to detail in Southwest Florida, the computer is not going to save you," Mr. Lee said.

He moved to Florida from Ohio when he was 4 years old and grew up on Fort Myers Beach. Mr. Lee graduated from Cypress Lake High School in 1974.

At Florida A&M at Tallahassee, he earned a bachelor's of science and architectural studies. He was also a walk-on for the football team.

"It was an interesting experience because at the time it was about 95 percent black," Mr. Lee said. "That was probably the experience of a lifetime."

He saw some of the prejudices and racial tension of the 1970s first hand, and said he left with a better understanding of people in general.

"Playing football, and interacting with your teammates, you put all that prejudice aside," Mr. Lee said. "Understanding the unity of the team, how to work together and attain goals and be trusting of each other, regardless of race."

That sense of teamwork is strong among Mr. Lee's staff now, which includes his son.

"They feel the same pride of authorship in designing and developing a successful project (as I do)," he said. "I feel strongly about the personnel I have. When you hire us you really get our entire firm."

Mr. Lee also spent one year as an intern at an architectural firm in Jacksonville; afterwards, he graduated with a master's in architecture from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

Fort Myers was his first stop after graduate school and Mr. Lee made a living doing drafting work for a local firm.

Now, most of his business is from word of mouth referrals.

He likes to get up at 6 a.m. three days a week to play in a local pick-up basketball game, but the place you'll most likely spot him is in the yard.

"To get out on the weekend and work in the yard is good therapy," he said. "...Not thinking about clients or contracting details." ■

Woodyard & Associates LLC

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

PROFESSIONALS WITH PASSION

<p style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 2px;">Warehouse for Lease or Sale in Benchmark Corporate Park</p> <p style="background-color: #FFD700; padding: 2px; text-align: center;">Just Reduced</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25,000± SF incl. 450± SF Office w/2 Restrooms • 4 OH Grade Level Doors • Two (2) Truckwell Doors • City Water and Sewer • IL - Light Industrial • All Block & Sprinkled • 4 OH Grade Level Doors • Benchmark Corporate Park • Off I-75, Exit 138 <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Lease: \$4.75 PSF + \$2.00 PSF CAM Sale: \$2,475,000 Contact: Todd Holman WA#987</p>	<p style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 2px;">Vacant Commercial Parcel</p> <p style="background-color: #FFD700; padding: 2px; text-align: center;">New Listing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21,750± SF • Located on MLK Blvd • Near Evans Ave • Zoned Commercial Intensive • Many Possible uses • Including Built-to-Suite <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: #003366;">Price \$189,000 Contact: Steve Wood WA2030</p>	<p style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 2px;">Commercial Corner for Sale Cape Coral</p> <p style="background-color: #FFD700; padding: 2px; text-align: center;">MAKE AN OFFER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • .24± Acres • 125± Frontage/ Tropicana Pkwy • Adjacent to Citgo Fuel Station • 1 Block West Burt Store Rd • Zoned C1 • Allows Banks, Restaurants Retail, Pharmacy & More • MOTIVATED SELLER <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: #003366;">MOTIVATED SELLER - MAKE AN OFFER Contact: Tom Woodyard or Carrie Vincent WA1208</p>	<p style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 2px;">Warehouse For Sub-Lease</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 35,550±SF Warehouse • 1,334±SF Office under AC • East of Evans on Edison Ave • Zoning I2 • Large Yard • Entirely fenced & paved <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: #003366;">Lease: \$4.50 SF NNN+ CAM Contact: Todd Holman WA1992</p>	<p style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 2px;">Office Suite For Sale or Lease</p> <p style="background-color: #FFD700; padding: 2px; text-align: center;">Retiring Physician Says 'Sell Now'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2,654±SF • Located in Lehigh Acres • Office or Medical Use • Immediate Occupancy • CC - Community Commercial • Medical Impact Fees Paid • High Traffic Counts • Suite Can Be Subdivided <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: #003366;">Sale: \$425,000 Lease: 12.00 PSF + CAM Contact: Robyn Wright or Alex Wright, CCIM WA1980</p>
<p style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 2px;">94±AC Commercial Site North Fort Myers</p> <p style="background-color: #FFD700; padding: 2px; text-align: center;">PRICE REDUCTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between Cleveland Ave & US 41 • C2 Zoning • Fenced • Lee/Charlotte City Access • Allows Storage Facility Contractors/Builders Auto Repair & More • Utilities Available <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: #003366;">Sale: \$149,000 or \$3.64 PSF Contact: Tom Woodyard & Carrie Vincent WA2010</p>	<p style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 2px;">Warehouse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 62,400± SF • 3,311± SF Office Space • Just off Daniels Pkwy • Quick Access to I-75 • 3-Phase Power • 3 Dock High Doors • Extra Paved Parking • Airport Woods Comm.Ctr <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: #003366;">\$3.90 PSF + \$1.85 PSF CAM Contact: Todd Holman WA1379</p>	<p style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 2px;">.57± Acre Commercial Site on Lee Boulevard</p> <p style="background-color: #FFD700; padding: 2px; text-align: center;">New Listing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 200'± Frontage • Corner Visibility • 6 Lane Roadway • N of Leeland Heights Blvd • East/West Corridor • To Ft Myers & Cape Coral • Zoned CPD • Allows Banks/Retail/Restaurants <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: #003366;">\$425,000 or \$17 PSF Contact: Tom Woodyard or Carrie Vincent WA2035</p>	<p style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 2px;">Office & Retail Unit For Lease</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,225±SF & 1,280±SF Units • One Fully Built-Out • Medical/Office and One Retail Space on Metro Pkwy • Zoned CPD • Medical Impact Fees Paid • Maximum Exposure • Motivated Owner <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: #003366;">Lease: \$14.00 PSF + \$3.25 PSF CAM Contact: Robyn Wright or Alex Wright, CCIM WA1995</p>	<p style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 2px;">Warehouse For Lease in Punta Gorda</p> <p style="background-color: #FFD700; padding: 2px; text-align: center;">New Construction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three (3) Units Available from 1,250± SF- 5,000± SF • Fenced, Gated, Lighted • Ample Paved Parking • Zoned - Light Industrial • Phase Three Electrical • OH and Main Doors • Four (4) miles East of I-75 <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: #003366;">\$6.50 PSF + \$2.50 (Estimated CAM) Contact: Honora Jacobus WA1783</p>

THE STATEMENTS AND FIGURES PRESENTED HEREIN, WHILE NOT GUARANTEED, ARE SECURED FROM SOURCES WE BELIEVE AUTHORITATIVE. SUBJECT TO PRIOR SALE, LEASE, WITHDRAWAL AND PRICE CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE.

WOODYARD & ASSOCIATES, LLC COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

Pinebrook Park, 12995 S. Cleveland Ave., Suite 219, Fort Myers, FL 33907

Phone: (239) 425-6000 • Fax: (239) 425-6001

www.wa-cr.com • Licensed Real Estate Broker

For resourceful tools and our latest listings visit

www.wa-cr.com