

# DESIGNING THE NCARB OF TODAY

The Council's oldest living president embarked on reforms still valid 40 years later.

With what seems to be a pat answer he recites often, Dean Gustavson, FAIA, identifies with the spirit of volunteers that has made NCARB what it is today ... literally.

"I keep busy," says NCARB's oldest living president. "That's the whole secret of life."

Gustavson, 86, of St. George, UT, served as president in 1970, right after the now 91-year-old Council marked its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Much has changed since then with the organization that determines standards of the profession's skills and qualifications for licensure. And yet, in Gustavson's eyes, much has remained the same because many of the new structures and systems he helped establish are still in place today, albeit in later versions.

In fact, a description of NCARB by just about anyone—student, intern, educator, practitioner, or firm principal—would include some of the ideas that he originally entertained and perhaps initiated. A healthy and energetic man who somehow sidetracked the usual effects of aging, Gustavson says many of those memories came flooding back during his recent attendance at the Annual Meeting and Convention in San Francisco. "We did some basic things that made it possible for NCARB to build on," he said.

## THE EXAMINED LIFE

Shortly after taking office as NCARB's president, Gustavson helped lead the Council to focus on standardizing the numerous and diverse architectural exams leading to licensure that were administered by states across the country. Despite the fact that NCARB had produced its first general exam in 1965, many states created their own versions to retain content of importance to a given state or geographic area.

Gustavson's first became interested in the exam years earlier when he worked on it for the state of Utah, on whose board he served starting in 1958 at the age of 34. That is when he realized each state had a different exam. If an architect wanted to practice in another state, he or she would have to apply to that state, meet its requirements, and possibly take its own examination.

"It raised in my mind that if every state board chair was writing a different examination, my good gosh, we'll have all kinds of examinations that aren't meaningful as far as reciprocity," he said.

Reform related to one exam that would be accepted beyond one single state's borders demanded greater unity, Gus-

tavson believed. This inspired him to lead efforts to bring together representatives from several western states' boards. In a 1962 meeting in Las Vegas, NV, the mission of exam standardization began to take shape.

One indirect result of this effort was the formation of what would eventually be six geographic regions that made up NCARB as early as 1966, the same year that Gustavson served as director on the Council. The 10 states that became known as the Western Conference included Gustavson's state of Utah and the newest states of Alaska and Hawaii.

## THE MAN'S PLAN

Even with buy-in from the various state jurisdictions, forging a national exam was difficult because states were particular about the standards unique to each state, he recalls. For instance, Florida initially objected because the exam did not probe a young architect's knowledge about designing structures to withstand hurricanes, he said.

"Some felt that no single exam could cover all the important particulars that any given state has and needs in an exam," he said, comparing the intra-state limitations that

would result to something that a roomful of picky lawyers might have created.

Still, the jurisdictions began to see the value of, first, regional standards and then national standards, and so the new national exam began to emerge.

In 1969, at the start of his term as president, Gustavson delivered a state-of-the-profession report at the Annual Meeting and Conference in Chicago. His question to attendees set the stage for major changes to the examination when he asked: “What is it that makes an architect?”



**LEFT:** THIS RESTORED OPEN-COCKPIT BOEING STARMAN BI-PLANE (MODEL BT17), OWNED AND FLOWN BY GUSTAVSON TODAY, IS THE SAME MODEL HE FLEW IN FLIGHT TRAINING IN WORLD WAR II.

**RIGHT:** WILLIAM J. GEDDIS, FAIA, CONGRATULATES GUSTAVSON AT THE 1970 NCARB ANNUAL MEETING.

The Annual Meeting attendees adopted a resolution titled “Continuation of Studies Toward the Development of a New Examination.” A year later, at the Annual Meeting that concluded Gustavson’s time in office, the theme of the gathering over which he presided was appropriately titled “Change in Motion.” By 1971, the Council began to phase out the original exam and launch the new one, which is considered the forerunner of the Architect Registration Examination® (ARE®).

Taking six years to complete, the new standardized national exam required more problem-solving and objective reasoning than subjective critique of architectural designs. It was called the Professional Examination, and the test for architects who had not studied at approved architectural schools was called the Equivalency Examination.

## AN AGE OF CHANGE

The 1960s and ‘70s were both turbulent and yet ironically constructive—for American society at large, as well as for the architectural profession. Gustavson recalls a news-making civil rights protest happening at Dupont Circle, just blocks away from NCARB’s new national headquarters in Washington, DC. Meanwhile, he mentions the foundation-building progress the organization made in those years—especially to become more conscious of a higher purpose.



In Gustavson’s opinion, “NCARB was nothing but a social organization. It was not taking on the serious matters of the day in a changing world. NCARB—all of us—had to become more responsible and responsive to changes in society.”

For Gustavson, that included ensuring that architectural students got a high-quality and applicable education by exploring with the National Architectural Accrediting Boards what a set core curriculum would look like. From his perspective, work with architectural schools was a two-way process. He wanted the nation’s schools of architecture to better understand the architectural exam, and he invited architectural educators to affiliate with NCARB and serve on its committees.

He reached out to foreign architects in the same way. He supported global acceptance of architects. He traveled to Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom to improve NCARB’s relations, gain

acceptance of the national exam, and thereby create a form of international mobility for architects.

He organized and chaired the first international conference—called the World Conference on International Reciprocity for Architects—in 1971 in Amsterdam and invited architects from around the world to discuss standards and reciprocity. Such efforts continue today in the form of NCARB’s Tri-National Agreement with Canada and Mexico and the Broadly Experienced Foreign Architects program, a pathway for non-U.S. architects to practice here.

## FLYING HIGH

Gustavson’s contributions naturally sprang from his own love of the profession and, even more, his zest for life. Despite being retired for 20 years, he stays busy with maintaining his pilot’s license to fly, writing poetry, reading, and painting. He and his wife, Vonda, visit his three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren often.

Professionally, he founded and guided the firms of Dean Gustavson Associates (design) and Gustavson Group (project programming) with Utah offices in Salt Lake City and satellite offices in California and Arizona. He specialized in designing hospitals, businesses, and schools and was licensed in six states.

Today, he takes humble pride in many things, the least of which is helping to bring NCARB into the 20<sup>th</sup> century—or “modernizing” it, in his words. His progressive leadership perhaps stems from his service in the U.S. Air Force as a captain during World War II. As squadron commander, he learned the benefits of strategic thinking and leadership. He flew 32 combat missions before leaving the service and deciding to study architecture.

Although some would agree with Ralph Waldo Emerson that “There is properly no history, only biography,” Gustavson is proof that it can be both.

His biography has, in fact, greatly contributed to NCARB’s history. **DC**