

A Legacy of Architecture's Impact: MAF Renames Grant in Honor of Late Program Leader Damian Farrell, FAIA

Originally published 04/28/2023



Over the past twelve years, MAF's Architecture Awareness Grants program was led by late MAF board member Damian Farrell. Advancing awareness of how architecture enriches life was not only Damian's MAF life, but also his personal and professional passion. Damian passed away in February of this year.

In recognition of Damian's contribution to the Architecture Awareness Grants program and to MAF, MAF has renamed the program the Damian Farrell Architecture Awareness Grant. The MAF Board of Directors lauded Damian as a devoted advocate for Michigan architecture, and role model for the kind of community impact that can result from dedication and vision.

The Damian Farrell Architecture Awareness Grant program provides financial assistance to organizations and individuals with programs that connect people and architecture, and/or increase awareness and appreciation of architecture. MAF allocates \$20,000 annually for the grants program; grants are awarded in January and July of each year.

As program chair, Damian advocated for organizations with programs designed to enhance awareness of architecture and was responsible for thousands of grant dollars being awarded to support these groups. Through his leadership, he expanded the program's reach to benefit even more architecture-based programs that served Michigan residents of all ages.

MAF President Doug Kueffner summed up the sentiments of the entire MAF board, in his comments about Damian:

"The mission of the Michigan Architectural Foundation is to increase awareness of how architecture enriches life. Damian Farrell embodied that mission in everything he did. His energy, passion and vision for the Architecture Awareness Grants program transformed it into perhaps the most mission-centric of our programs. In the early years of the program, we were granting a couple of thousand dollars for awareness grants throughout the state. Today, we are distributing \$20,000 annually to programs that promote and advance our mission. We hope to increase that amount in the years ahead. All of that growth should be attributed to Damian and his commitment to the grants program, and to increasing awareness and appreciation of Michigan architecture."

Doug continues, “Damian was such a unique individual, and his personality was infectious. He always saw the positive aspects during every one of our MAF board discussions. He charmed us without us realizing that it was even happening. We will miss him dearly; he was our friend.”

Damian was also the Principal and Owner of Ann Arbor-based Damian Farrell Design Group and served on the AIA Michigan Board of Directors as the 2023 Director of the AIA Huron Valley chapter. His interest in a career in architecture was inspired by a childhood neighbor in his native South Africa, who was both a sugar cane farmer (like Damian’s father) as well as an architect. ([read the profile article on Damian, from MAF’s April 2020 newsletter](#)).



“Damian loved his profession and was an excellent ambassador for architecture and for MAF,” said former long-time American Institute of Architects Michigan Executive Director and current MAF board member, Rae Dumke, Hon. AIA. “He was a beautiful person and loved life, and it showed in everything he said and did. We were so fortunate to have had him in our lives.”

MAF also has created a new endowed fund to support the grant program, called The Damian Farrell Fund; details are to be announced. The grants (along with other MAF grant programs) have also been supported by two major annual fundraisers, MAF’s Auction for Education and MAF’s Fore a Great Cause Golf Outing.



Under Damian’s leadership, projects receiving MAF’s Damian Farrell Architecture Awareness Grants over the years include:

- architecture-based podcasts, ‘Hidden in Plain Site’ and ‘Forming Function’
- MAF’s ArchiTreks educational series (in conjunction with Detroit Public Television, which airs on the Michigan Learning Channel)
- the award-winning documentary on Charlevoix’s unique Mushroom Houses, and the film ‘Eero Saarinen: The Architect Who Saw the Future’
- NOMA Detroit’s Project Pipeline Architecture Camps for minority and under-represented high school students (a multi-year award recipient)
- free architecture tour maps of Michigan communities including Flint, Ann Arbor, and Grand Rapids; the book, Guardians of Michigan, featuring architectural sculptures from buildings throughout the state
- Flint’s Flat Lot Design Competition
- Washtenaw County’s Community Action Network (CAN) Art & Design program
- ... and countless others.

(note: the Damian Farrell Architecture Awareness Grant program is now being led by MAF Trustee Alan Cobb; for more information on how to apply: <https://michiganarchitecturalfoundation.org/grants/awareness-grants/>)