

# O'BRIEN/ATKINS ASSOCIATES, PA

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At Biogen Idec's new RTP laboratory building, a sweeping central staircase links each of the facility's four floors, encouraging researcher interaction and contributing to a tangible sense of shared identity within the company's scientific community.

up the O'Brien/Atkins team. As a consequence, the firm's evolution and growth has paralleled that of the entire North Carolina region. "From the beginning, we've tried to understand what our clients were looking for and assist them in realizing their vision," says Atkins. "Given the dynamics of the Triangle in the past thirty years, we're very proud to have contributed to their success."

## LEADERSHIP IN DESIGN

The firm's inception in 1975 was, itself, appropriately auspicious; designing the home of UNC coaching legend, Dean Smith. From this promising beginning, founding partners Bill O'Brien, FAIA, John Atkins and Belton Atkinson have since forged a respected architectural practice that has, and continues to positively shape the built environment of the Triangle region. O'Brien/Atkins has been responsible for the design of many of this area's most notable buildings, including all of Cisco Systems' RTP campus, GlaxoSmithKline's U.S. headquarters and administration buildings, MCNC, laboratory facilities on Centennial Campus at NC State University, the Kenan Center at UNC-Chapel Hill and MCI's corporate offices in Cary. And, the tradition of design excellence yet continues with the firm's participation in the design of the proposed Raleigh Convention Center and RDU's new Terminal C.

Nevertheless, as Jim Nichols, the firm's director of science and technology business development, makes clear, O'Brien/Atkins' reach extends well beyond the boundaries of North Carolina. "As we've helped the Triangle grow, we have also come to serve a much broader market throughout the country," says Nichols. With projects from Florida to New Jersey, the firm has achieved a much-deserved stature, valued for its responsive approach to the design

of technologically advanced building environments. According to Atkins, responsiveness has always been key to the firm's success. "This is what makes us tick," he adds. "This is the way we act, the way we behave and what we believe."

Atkins' ideals for a highly responsive business organization are embodied in the firm's Statement of Vision and Core Values. It is an admirable model of professional practice that equitably balances client interests, social responsibility and staff fulfillment with sustainable profitability. Coupled with O'Brien/Atkins' finely-honed guidelines for project success, these founding principles guide the firm throughout every project undertaken.

The benefits of this philosophical approach are amply evident. In 1998, the North Carolina Chapter of the American Institute of Architects named O'Brien/Atkins as its inaugural Firm of the Year, from a statewide pool of potential candidates. More important, in the view of those individuals and organizations the firm directly serves, O'Brien/Atkins enjoys a client return rate exceeding 70 percent. And, as a collegial employer, the firm has an enviable reputation for staff satisfaction and retention. The average tenure of the firm's 70 member staff is over twelve years.

## ROOTED IN COMMUNITY VALUES

One by-product of O'Brien/Atkins' instinct for responsive service is the value it brings its community. The firm has long been actively engaged in a broad range of community-based initiatives: performing pro bono work for the Food Bank of North Carolina, funding academic scholarships at NC State University's College of Design, North Carolina Central University and Durham Technical Community College, and serving on the boards

"In many ways, architecture is a kind of language. It has its own system of grammar and connotation. Its vocabulary, though formed of brick and mortar, concrete, steel and glass, is nevertheless just as capable of eloquence as is any other language. The real challenge for the architect is one of translation; to carefully listen to the needs and aspirations of the client, to capture the essence of that vision and then translate those ideals into the language of architecture." Roger L. Spears, AIA, senior design architect, O'Brien/Atkins Associates, PA

Capturing the essence of a client's vision and consistently translating that vision into a productive building environment has positioned O'Brien/Atkins Associates, an RTP-based architectural firm, at the forefront of its industry. For the past 29 years, this full-service architectural firm has executed hundreds of successful projects for

an impressive list of clients, over 60 of which have garnered state and regional design awards.

Firm president and CEO, John L. Atkins, III, FAIA, attributes the organization's success to self-confidence, relying on the skills and talents of the many professionals who make

## "Translating Vision: The Architecture of O'Brien/Atkins Associates, PA"



O'Brien/Atkins' design for Cisco Systems RTP campus captures the company's progressive outlook while preserving an intimate, park-like setting for the enjoyment of its staff.

One example, Biogen Idec, an RTP-based biotechnology company, well illustrates the firm's contribution to the growth of the region's life sciences industry. Dating back to the mid-90s, O'Brien/Atkins' partnership with Biogen Idec has yielded a vibrant corporate campus, including state-of-the-art laboratories, office space and training facilities. Projects of this scope and diversity are not uncommon for O'Brien/Atkins. The firm's comprehensive team approach to design offers their clients a distinct advantage.

"Because we are a full-service architectural firm, housed under a single roof, we have the ability to walk down the hall and discuss client work with design architects, electrical/mechanical engineers, interior designers or landscape architects and that gives us a real edge," says Atkins. "It means we can call on the expertise of any service in our portfolio of experience and quickly respond to the needs of our prospective clients."

An important component of this in-house expertise includes Dr. Charles E. Hamner, Jr., DVM, Ph.D., who serves as the firm's Life Sciences Advisor. Prior to joining O'Brien/Atkins, Dr. Hamner led the NC Biotechnology Center for 14 years, making significant contributions to North Carolina's reputation as one of the country's top five regions for biotechnology.

## THE VIRTUE OF COLLABORATION

The future for O'Brien/Atkins Associates, PA is bright. In addition to the focus on life sciences and their recent selection as architects for the new Raleigh Convention Center with teammates Clearscapes of Raleigh and TVS of Atlanta, the company is poised to continue its tradition of service, contributing to economic growth throughout the region.

As the company's Vision and Core Values states, "The power of collaboration is greater than the power of the individual." "We have a strong emphasis here on understanding what our clients are trying to achieve. The space we create for them must accomplish an objective that serves their organizational needs as well as their aspirations," comments Atkins. "Whether we are providing renovations to an existing building or designing a new one, we work to supplement their strategic business objectives—a trait that has rewarded us with the ability to lead within the design services industry."

For more information on the services offered by the O'Brien/Atkins team visit [www.obrienatkins.com](http://www.obrienatkins.com) or call (919) 941-9000

## O'BRIEN/ATKINS VISION & CORE VALUES

**We are a business** and will behave and make project and firm decisions accordingly and with honesty and integrity

**We are a self-sustaining** firm with an identity and life focused on leading in the evolution of design services

**In creative solutions** that include and extend beyond the traditional aesthetic role of architecture

**In leading**, educating, managing and challenging clients

**That the power** of collaboration is greater than the power of the individual

**In exceptionally talented** people serving the needs of the firm

**Equitable** relationships between employees and the firm that acknowledge commitments to lives beyond work

of a number of local, non-profit organizations. "It's our way of giving something back to our region," says Atkins. "When our community is successful, everyone shares in the success." Jim Nichols picks up Atkins' thought, noting that the firm is now engaged in community-building initiatives throughout North Carolina and beyond.

"More and more, we are assisting communities visualize their future in

ways that go well beyond the design of buildings alone," says Nichols, whose 17 years with the NC Department of Commerce brings added credibility to O'Brien/Atkins' public service outreach. "For example, we're working with the Columbus, Ohio region, helping them understand how they can spur economic development and create high-value job opportunities for their work force."

## A FUTURE IN THE LIFE SCIENCES

As O'Brien/Atkins moves forward, the firm is well-prepared for continued growth within the region. Drawing upon their experience in the educational and private arena, much of the firm's present focus is within the life sciences industry. The growth of this market sector in RTP and the firm's acknowledged expertise in the field has positioned O'Brien/Atkins as a leader in laboratory and life sciences space planning, design and development.

## O'BRIEN/ATKINS SUCCESSFUL PROJECT CRITERIA

- Quality Product** – design, services and documents
- Satisfied Client** – external as well as internal
- Satisfied Team** – well-managed and led allowing for professional fulfillment
- Acceptable Profitability** – providing services within fee.