



ALLIANCE LIGHTING



A Merging of Efforts, Interests and Resources

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That was exactly the concept that Mark DeVries had in mind when he founded Alliance Lighting, the

Columbia, MD, based manufacturer's rep agency. The goal was to form an alliance – a relationship between designers, manufacturers and sales organizations that would benefit all involved. Fourteen years later – and after realizing impressive sales growth across the board – the firm has established solid footing for continued growth for years to come.



Barcelo Crestline – *Photographer: Michael K. Wilkinson*

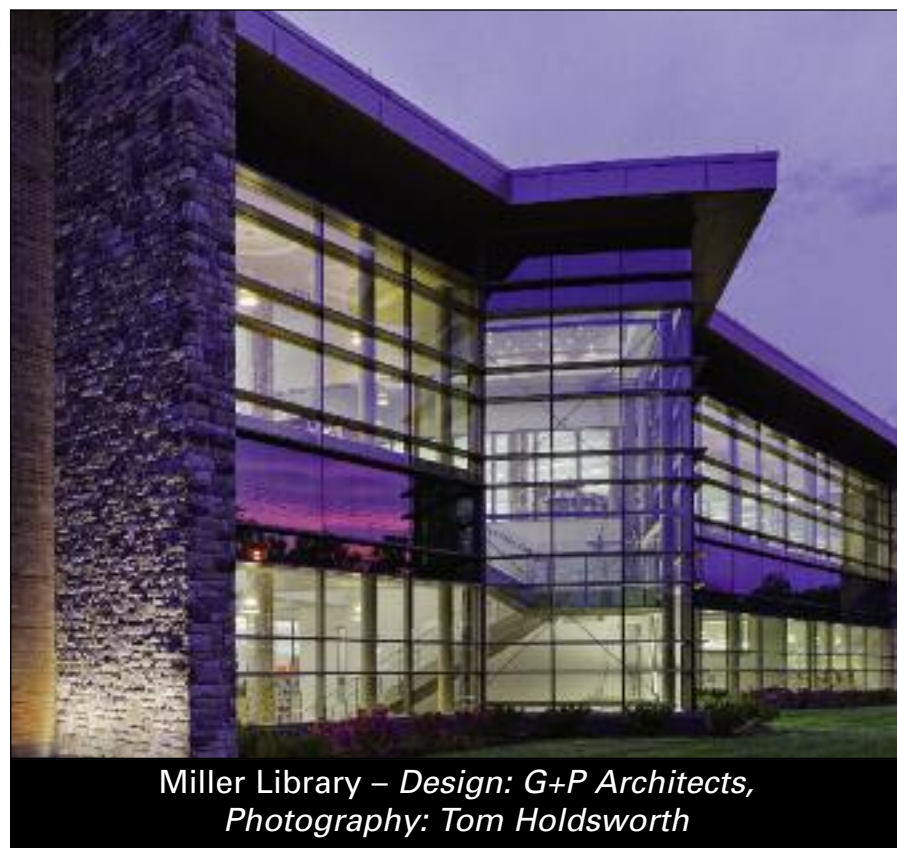
Mark's career in the lighting industry began when he was hired as a sales manager at Sterner Lighting in his home state of Minnesota. After working with designers across the country on special projects including venues such as sports arenas, hotel complexes and façade lighting, he discovered his passion lied in working directly with Architects and Lighting Designers helping them realize their lighting objectives. He moved from Minnesota to Maryland and worked for several lighting sales agencies before forming Alliance Lighting in 1998. From that point on, he sought out a group of high quality, premier design lighting manufacturers who partnered with him to build a market for their products within the Maryland/Washington, D.C. metro area. It's been full speed ahead ever since.

Collaboration is one of the consistent principles that Alliance Lighting demonstrates day in and day out. For example, the Alliance Design Sales team works closely with its Customer Service team

keeping them informed of key details throughout the life span of a project. “(Mark) has done a good job of setting up the firm. He's got several people that we can call”, says Maureen Moran, Principal at MCLA, an award-winning Washington, DC-based architectural lighting design firm. “This shows good leadership – a team that covers for each other.” MCLA has a long history of partnering with Alliance on a variety of projects over the years, and has seen the company grow from two – Mark and industry veteran and partner Joe Faass – to a team of 12 full-time staff over a 14-year period.

A client-focused and collaborative approach is also evident in how Alliance works with its specifier partners. “Alliance is very customer focused, and in it for the overall result, not just to sell fixtures”, according to Ann Neeriemer, Associate at Perkins Eastman, an international award-winning architectural firm based

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Miller Library – *Design: G+P Architects, Photography: Tom Holdsworth*



Miller Library – *Design: G+P Architects, Photography: Tom Holdsworth*

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in New York, NY. “They’re willing to sit with the designer, the architect and others to go through the details. I never feel like they’re trying to sell me something.” A similar sentiment was echoed by Robert Stewart, Project Manager of Hitt Contracting, Inc. “It seems like they get involved with the architects, they listen to them and the owners, and hear what the vision is for the space. Then they bring products in that they feel will provide them with what they’re looking for on that job. They’re listening for the input and providing solutions that meet the owners’ needs.” Robert points to AARP Recording Studios as one project example that illustrates the positive and productive process that characterizes work with Alliance.

This approach reflects the agency’s goal of developing long-term relationships with its clientele, providing a high level of customer care and ensuring all employees have access to the client base. Whether the client seeks technical support, product and application information, pricing or lead times, there is always someone at Alliance available to service the client. Further, Alliance focuses its efforts on working directly with the design community and eliminating barriers to getting their specified product delivered on the job. Finally, ongoing communication with and on behalf of the manufacturers – many of whom have been represented by Alliance for over a decade – completes the network of channel partners and

ensures an open dialog among all client touch points.

The importance of this style of communication is noteworthy. Not only do employees have access to clients, but clients are also provided direct contact with manufacturers. “Alliance understands that the open communication channel is important for designers to have direct access to manufacturers at certain times”, says David Ghatan, Senior Associate at C.M. Kling & Associates, an award-winning architectural lighting design firm in Alexandria, VA. “Sometimes clear communication is a struggle with some manufacturer’s rep agencies...we don’t have that problem with Alliance.” Robert Stewart is even more emphatic in his praise: “My biggest successes have been when we’re able to interact and communicate schedules and then Alliance knows what’s expected and (they’re) able to interface with the manufacturers.” Adds Claus Brix, VP, Market Development & Sales for Targetti Poulsen, USA, an internationally renowned lighting manufacturer, “Mark will tell me pretty matter-of-factly what is good, what is bad (and he is) very direct in a positive way about customer expectations.

This is important for a brand like Louis Poulsen which needs to be specified, understood as a quality product and as a quality brand.”

Alliance’s business relationships are the result of both its ‘staying power’ and attention to detail. Maureen Moran states “When you have a customized product, it’s a complex and very conceptual process – sketches, discussions, back and forth between the manufacturer and the client. You’ve got to hang in there all the way to the end, and Mark and his colleagues at Alliance follow through, put the pieces together, and complete the puzzle.” Mark Sieber, President of Erco Lighting, a world class lighting manufacturer with U.S. base in Edison, NJ, states that “The broad range of projects we’ve done with Alliance is indicative of high end design, exceptional execution at the specification stage, tendering and delivery stage and a harmonious relationship in that things go smoothly.” In addition, David Prevet, Senior Associate of Grimm + Parker Architects, in McLean, VA, says “Alliance is right there at the drop of a hat to see things through an issue or correct things that come up unexpectedly.” Adds Melanie Hennigan,

Owner/Partner of Grimm + Parker, “We’ve done many projects with Alliance, including Miller Library, Frederick Library and the College of Southern Maryland and Mark has helped me on the lighting of almost every single job I’ve done.”

The fact that Mark and his team of experts have significant experience within the lighting industry also goes a long way. “What I’ve recognized in working with Mark is that his work doesn’t take the stage, but serves to enhance the hard work that we’ve done in design”, says David Prevet. “It’s not about the fixtures, it’s about the architecture and his work is really there to enhance what we’ve tried to achieve, which is a fantastic way to consider the lighting. Mark offers guidance and expertise and he’s had some great ideas that helped us improve our design and take the next step.” There are other benefits to the collective experience as well. Says Ann Neeriemer, “As a designer, having someone that really knows lighting from the technical aspect as well as from the visual ambience feel of it is tremendously helpful.” Claus Brix continues, “Mark is more than familiar with the product and the brand. He actually loves the product and is a brand ambassador. Mark and the Alliance sales people ‘get it’ about the product and what the brand represents.”

Alliance staff also understands the importance of providing customers with value added service. Lighting designers, architects, contractors and manufacturers alike share top billing at the agency and receive the attention of committed team members. George Bosson, Owner/Partner of Amerillum Brands and Founder of A-Light,



AARP Broadcast Studios

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remarks, “The staff is a remarkable group of people that are dedicated to their craft. The inside staff is doggedly determined to ensure that the process of order fulfillment goes as smooth and precisely as possible.” He points out a significant project done jointly with Alliance for Foley and Lardner Law Offices, LLP, and notes that Mark himself models the customer service orientation for the entire organization, regardless of the size or scope of a project. Robert Stewart says “He embodies the best of customer service and responsiveness. He wants to be fair and he wants everyone to be treated fairly in the entire process. Not everyone out there in the industry is like that and some don’t want to have dialogue with people but want to stay hidden.” Tony Janezich, Principal and Co-founder of AJ Architects in Washington, D.C., states “Mark is an institution in this area, yet he still bends over backward to help us out, and his responsiveness is driven by his desire for customer satisfaction.” Notes Mark Sieber

“(Alliance projects are) both domestic and international, and Mark does not treat them differently, meaning a domestic job in his back yard in DC and one halfway around the world have the involvement and engagement that is equally high...very hands-on, very professional and very engaged.” As a matter of fact, in late 2009, Alliance opened a sales office in London – Alliance Lighting UK – recognizing that many Washington, D.C. design firms also have offices in London, a hub of international design. Currently, Alliance reports projects are underway in Azerbaijan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Hong Kong and Morocco, as well as the UK.

“They are of like mind and like vision” is a phrase that has been used to describe the Alliance team, and vision is an essential characteristic for designer and architect clients. According to Melanie Hennigan “If I have a design vision for trying to create a certain atmosphere or character Mark and Alliance will provide light fixtures that speak to that particular ambience and help make it unique and support that design vision. We have this synergy – I talk about a design concept and they come up with a real product

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Foley & Lardner – *Foley & Lardner, LLP Law Offices; Architect: GGA (Group Goetz Architects)*



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that does exactly what I need it to do.” And many clients also report that staying current and looking ahead to new trends and fixtures is what sets Alliance apart from other rep agencies. Tony Janezich continues, “Alliance is always trying to find the state-of-the-art light fixtures; they’re always pushing the envelope with fixtures that are new, and they are very good at bringing to the forefront the state of the art of lighting.” Speaking about Mark specifically, Mark Sieber notes that “He’s better at seeing the future than most”, while Maureen Moran states that “he likes to find things that are different and unique.”

The accolades for Mark and his work are many and a laundry list for success. “I consider a few of our reps as collaborators in the ongoing development of the company and Mark is probably the primary collaborator on the rep side. He has such a phenomenal



Prince Frederick Library – Design: G+P Architects,
Photography: Kenneth M. Wyner Photography

market sense and an appreciation for architectural lighting that he’s become an invaluable part of our organization”, says George Bosson. Maureen Moran believes “Alliance is the best rep agency in the Washington area...because Mark enjoys the business and is truly interested in what the end result is going to be, as opposed to just answering the questions.” Melanie Hennigan perhaps best sums up the collective sentiment regarding working with Mark and his agency: “I am so impressed with Mark as an individual...he is so

many things, he’s extremely knowledgeable about lighting, he’s a great human being, he’s got true integrity, he’s always taught me things about the lighting world and shares information that adds value to my work. It’s just a great experience working with him.”

This certainly sheds significant light on what it is that drives the success behind Alliance Lighting. And it doesn’t stop there. In 2010, Alliance Shading and Controls was founded to focus on the growing demand for integrated control of natural light through the use of

interior and exterior shading and louvers systems. Specializing in automated systems that track the sun and adjust the shading to reduce glare and heat gain while allowing natural light to illuminate the interior spaces, Alliance Shading and Controls provides turnkey solutions that span design support, installation and maintenance programs for commercial and residential projects. Today, the company is involved in many complex installations that include the integration of lighting control, A/V systems and automated shading in corporate, educational and hospitality environments.

The future for Alliance Lighting and its related entities indeed appears bright. Alliance will continue to provide service and products in response to customers’ needs as well as staying abreast of the continually changing technology and regulations that affect the design and construction industry as they relate to light. Maintaining the growth pattern that it has established and diversifying its offerings to address customer needs will be ongoing challenges, but they are challenges which Alliance has proven more than capable of meeting.



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