

Charles I. Bryant, 76, whose architectural firm designed hundreds of buildings in Washington and who mentored scores of architects during his 45-year career, died of a ruptured aneurysm June 7 in his office in Washington.

Mr. Bryant was the surviving principal in the architectural firm of Bryant & Bryant, which he established in 1969 with his younger brother and which is one of the oldest African American-owned firms in the country. The firm designed commercial office buildings, shopping centers, rapid transit stations, wastewater treatment plants, public firehouses, libraries, hospitals, convention centers, schools, recreation centers and churches.

Over the years, Mr. Bryant also worked with and advised hundreds of promising students, architects and engineers. About 100 of those who came through his firm now have their own companies across the country, said his son, Charles Bryant II, an architect who will continue to run the firm.

Under Mr. Bryant's leadership, the firm designed and supervised construction of the 1,800-student replacement campus for the old Dunbar High School in Washington, which the city's Fine Arts Commission singled out for its innovative motif. It also was lead design architect for the \$100 million University of the District of Columbia campus in Northwest Washington.

Mr. Bryant's work includes Howard University's Cancer Research Center and the 800-unit Howard Plaza apartments, the largest student dormitory on the campus. He also rehabilitated the Washington Center for Aging Services in Northeast Washington and designed several moderate-income housing complexes.

In 1976, the then-50-person company was cited in Black Enterprise Magazine as the largest African American-owned firm in the nation and one of the top-ranked black-owned businesses in the nation based on annual revenue.

By the early 1990s, the economic recession that devastated the real estate market forced Mr. Bryant to lay off employees. In a 1992 Washington Post article, Mr. Bryant, who was known for his sense of humor, said: "When friends ask me how I'm doing, I say, 'I'm living like a dog.' I quickly remind my friends I'm not referring to the little lap dogs ladies carry around. I'm talking about a flea- and tick-infested mutt dog."

The firm survived the downturn and the 1995 death of his brother and partner, Robert Bryant, because of Mr. Bryant's optimism, determination and family support, his wife said. "He persevered," said Waveney Bryant. "He drew strength from one of his mentors, Howard Mackey, a prominent architect, who told him, as long as he keeps the doors open and a job comes in, there is hope." The firm has operated continuously since its founding.

Charles Irving Bryant was born in Palmetto, Ga., and moved with his family to Arlington in 1939. He graduated from the District's Armstrong Technical High School, where he played football and was a top pole-vaulter.

He received a bachelor's degree in architecture from Howard University in 1954 and served in the Air Force as an engineering officer at Sculthorpe Air Base in England.

After working as an architect with private firms, the Veterans Administration and the General Services Administration, he opened his practice as Charles Irving Bryant Architects in 1965. Four years later, the firm became Bryant & Bryant when his brother, also a Howard-trained architect, joined him.

The firm, which also engaged in large-scale master planning work, served as executive architects-planners on the Fort Lincoln New Town project for the late developer Ted Hagans, and played a similar role on large projects in Guyana, South America.

In 1991, Mr. Bryant was inducted into the College of Fellows in the American Institute of Architects.

Mr. Bryant was a resident of Washington for 55 years and a member of All Souls Unitarian Church.

He was president of the D.C. Architects Registration Board, president of the D.C. Frontiers International, and held board memberships with the Girl Scouts Council of the Nation's Capital and the D.C. Private Industry Council.

Family members said that Mr. Bryant had a talent for making people feel at home, and that his sense of humor was magnetic. "Jokes punctuated his every conversation," a family member said. "Charlie always appreciated a good joke. He was known to laugh heartily and boisterously until tears ran down his cheeks and he was out of breath -- sometimes, at his own jokes."

In addition to his wife of 53 years and son, both of Washington, survivors include two daughters, Dr. Shawne Bryant of Virginia Beach and Shelley Plass of Miami; a sister, Frances Sellers of Arlington; and three grandchildren.

Source: Lamb, Yvonne Shonhoster “Prolific D.C. architect Charles I. Bryant Dies.” The Washington Post, June 22, 2005.