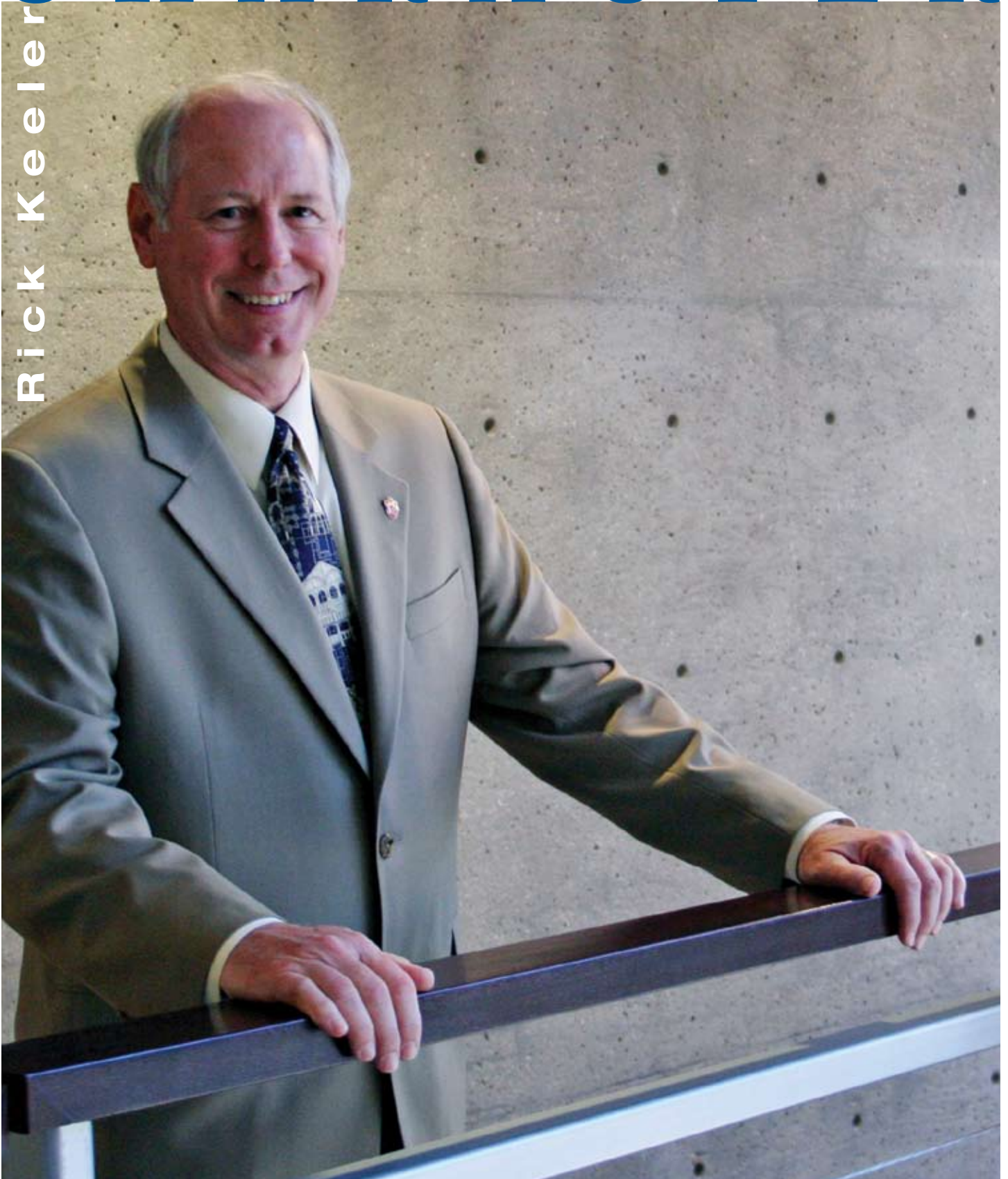


[PROFILE]

BUILDING

CHARACTER

Rick Keeler



A 1971 photo shows Burns & McDonnell Healthcare & Research Facilities Group leader Rick Keeler soaring to the ceiling of a makeshift Dojo in Cam Rahn Bay, Vietnam, landing a perfect flying side kick to a punching bag hung from the rafters.

“There wasn’t much to do after dark,” Keeler — a former Seabee — explains. “A couple of buddies and I started taking tae kwon do with some Korean contractors there.”

The instructors delighted in teaching Americans the hard way — with kicks that left dents and bruises. Keeler’s buddies quit after a couple of weeks. Keeler kept coming back. Two years later, he left Vietnam as a certified second-degree black belt — with the quiet confidence that he could achieve what he set his mind to.

Building Success

Keeler’s come up against the same kind of odds in his professional career — and won.

He answers carefully when asked if his success reflects his martial arts training. “I have had some success in competitive interviews,” he says. “But that warrior mentality is different than what Westerners might expect. A warrior avoids a fight — if you feel prepared, you are confident enough that you don’t have to.”

You don’t have to be around Keeler long to realize he lives the principles of tae kwon do — courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self-control and indomitable spirit. He has parlayed that strength of character — and a creative, collaborative design approach — into a career-long series of achievements. A Kansas City native transplanted to San Antonio early in his career, he had a hand in many of the region’s healthcare facilities.

His credits include the radiology department and hyperbaric and wound center at Christus Santa Rosa Medical Center; master plans and campus designs for the Methodist Health System in Boerne and San Antonio, and the virology research lab for the Southwest Foundation for Biomedical Research, also in San Antonio. He recently designed a new level-

one trauma center for Wilford Hall Medical Center at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

Facilities That Work

The morning after a 2 a.m. flight, Keeler is at the office early, in khakis and flannel shirt, for a few hours of catching up before a planned day of showing relatives around his “new” hometown. Mementos of family skiing and motorcycle trips are pinned to the corkboard in his new office. Between fielding a stream of calls on his cell and office phone — apologizing after each — he talks about his goals for the Burns & McDonnell healthcare group.

“We have an opportunity to make a tremendous impact,” he says. “With a common goal, we can combine forces to build things in a way that works. Take hospitals, for example. They have a mandate for a certain percentage of charity care, but are losing the most profitable business to specialty clinics.”

The right facilities can help hospitals compete, Keeler says, by making hospitals more attractive to patients and visitors — who are potential customers — in a way that also reduces costs: emergency rooms designed to eliminate long waits in a common area and require fewer staff. Ventilation systems that lower infection rates. Cooling, heating and power generation systems that reduce energy use — and protect against outages.

“What differentiates us from other architectural firms is a complete range of technical expertise,” he says. “Engineering. Program management. Fire protection. Expertise in emerging energy technologies. And, the level of quality Burns & McDonnell is known for.”



A Gift for Listening

Keeler is known for rapport with healthcare providers, says long-time client Sylvia Davila, president of Hand Rehabilitation Associates of San Antonio. Davila is a physical therapist with a national reputation in her field. Her clinic is located in the Texas Center for Athletes, which Keeler helped design.

Davila’s specialty practice includes molding custom splints for the delicate adjustments required to restore function after a hand injury. Keeler designed ergonomically sound pullout “peninsulas” centered around an adjustable seat, allowing her to keep her patient positioned and materials within easy reach.

“Rick came in and tried to understand what I did,” Davila says. “He asked questions about our functions, our patient flow — he’s just a really good listener.”

Davila says Keeler had a knack for finding consensus when medical doctors within various groups disagreed. “Even though some doctors are known for being difficult, Rick never had a problem,” she says. “He managed to listen and find a way to work things out.”

Keeler’s projects prior to joining Burns & McDonnell included the 17,000-square-foot Toyota Medical Clinic (left) and the 130,000-square-foot Texas Center for Athletes.

