

2015 National Signage Research & Education Conference (NSREC) Presentation Details



Topic: “Signs and Heritage Tourism”

Presenters: Ronald H. Frantz, Jr., AIA

Ron Frantz is a licensed architect who specializes in historic preservation, Main Street revitalization, neighborhood revitalization, and all types of community-based, grassroots type of design programs. With two degrees from The Tulane University of Louisiana, he has work experience that includes being a founding partner of two architecture firms, working in private sector firms, being staff for a local non-profit organization, and providing public service in a state agency as well as being part of the staff and faculty at a private college. Currently, he has positions with the College of Architecture at The University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma. He is an Associate Professor with the Architecture Division, and is Director of Great Plains Studios, a part of the Institute for Quality Communities.

As a citizen, Ron volunteers with many organizations in his community. After almost 30 years of living in historic streetcar neighborhoods flanking Route 66, he and his wife, Mary, continue to work on their fifth house in a great, but aging, 1960’s suburban neighborhood in Oklahoma City.

Abstract:

Signs of all types, sizes, shapes, materials, and colors are the way merchants communicate what products and services they offer. Signs are tools for businesses that still exist. They also are images of businesses that faded or of merchants who once were there. Old signs make for a 3-D history of a town’s commercial activities, recreational offerings, professional services, and merchants’ names. They show the honesty, relate the sincerity, and exhibit the ingenuity of the merchants’ wares and ways. Sometimes, they expose raw flaws. Misspellings, bygone goods and services, words and phrases now with new meanings make for an interesting read.

Many times these signs can be retained so that this heritage becomes part of the tourism focus. These signs represent the rhythm of the everyday routine, the toils of the merchant, the sweat of the blue collar worker, the talents of the businesswoman. They are a part of our Americana in our small towns, historic urban commercial areas, and old neighborhoods.

This presentation will include a random collection of signs found along Oklahoma’s Main Streets. Examples include communities that saved their historic ghost signs as well as places that had no sign heritage left, but through incentives, created new, memorable signage.