



Mackenzie's Seattle office is in the Logan Building and offers architecture, interiors, civil engineering, structural engineering, and land use planning services.

Photo by Kim Nguyen

Mackenzie celebrates 20 years in downtown Seattle

A Q+A with Brett Hanson, principal of Mackenzie's Seattle office

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Multi-disciplinary design firm Mackenzie this summer celebrated the 20th anniversary of its Seattle office.

The firm, which also has offices in Portland and Vancouver, set up shop in the Emerald City in the Logan Building in 2004. Today, that downtown property at 500 Union Street remains home but now to a vastly expanded enterprise.

The office has grown from five staff members to nearly 30 professionals. The first iteration of the Seattle office offered architecture and interiors services. Professions have since grown to also include civil engineering, structural engineering, and land use planning.

The firm's space at the building has also expanded over the course of multiple relocations and remodels to keep up with company growth and evolution. The latest remodel was completed in 2022 and doubled the office size to 5,600 square feet.

From its spot on Union Street, Mackenzie employees engage in a wide variety of project types and market sectors, with a particular focus on public projects and industrial manufacturing facilities. The Seattle office additionally serves the firm's retail, commercial, and advanced technology sectors. The office's diverse portfolio includes projects in Seattle as well as the

surrounding region, such as Everett, Shoreline and Renton.

Mackenzie is proud to have called downtown Seattle home for 20 years and is committed to remaining in the city. The Seattle team is also strongly invested in the local A/E/C community, including extensive engagement in the ACE Mentorship program, a free after-school program that connects high school students with industry professionals to help them pursue careers in architecture, construction, and engineering. Staff from all of the office's disciplines volunteer for the ACE Seattle Chapter.

Below, Brett Hanson, principal in Mackenzie's Seattle office, shares some of his history with the firm and reflects on the 20th anniversary.

Q: When did you start working at Mackenzie? What drew you to the firm?

A: Coincidentally, I started 20 years ago in our Portland office, right at the same time the Seattle office opened. As a young emerging professional fresh from the University of Oregon's School of Architecture, I was attracted initially to the



Hanson

Portland area and was fortunate enough to hold informational interviews with over a dozen firms as I got to know the city.

What drew me to Mackenzie was the firm's multidisciplinary structure of designers, engineers and planners all in house, where the opportunity to engage and work alongside such a diverse group of practicing professionals was unique in our industry. The unified mindset of problem solving and delivering solutions truly together was, and has continued to be, what fills my cup each and every day. Today, I'm thrilled with the opportunity to lead our Seattle office and share such a milestone.

Q: How has the firm's mission/culture evolved since you started?

A: In Seattle, there's a natural evolution when you grow from a handful of staff to where we're at now. There are more opportunities for cross-disciplinary coordination, and a really healthy variety of perspectives. It's been great to be part of that evolution.

Collectively, the firm is evolving in a number of ways. We've signed on to path to net zero commitments in both architecture and structural engineering (AIA 2030 and SE 2050). We're also working to improve minority representation in the design professions, and have signed on to the National Organization of Minority Architect's Call to Action. So, there are a lot of positive developments going on.

Q: What are some key moments and/or major projects that stand out to you?

A: I'm very excited for the current moment and our anniversary. A current major project is the Lynnwood Community Justice Center and its sister project, the Crisis Care Center. The care center will be a great local resource for community members in crisis and in need of substance abuse support. It's been a privilege to be part of that process, and make a positive social impact through our design professions.

A few more that come to mind are the Shoreline Community College Automotive Training Center, which we completed a few years ago; Twelve, a sustainable fuel innovator, which is currently in progress; and a variety of projects in the Redmond Ridge industrial area.

Q: What have been some of the most challenging times/projects during your time at Mackenzie?

A: Like many A/E firms, the recession and pandemic were some of the most challenging times in the past 20 years. But our leadership and our staff saw these challenges as a time of opportunity to continue to serve our clients and community, versus hunker down or retract. With that mentality and drive, we've never thrived more, and our clients know they're at the top of mind during the good and the bad times.

Q: Can you tell me more about the firm's relationship with the broader Seattle community?

A: Our projects, over time, are the foundation of our relationship with the community. That's one reason I'm so excited for the future. We're also very involved in the ACE mentorship program, with members of each of our disciplines volunteering with kids, and sharing their excitement for all the diverse opportunities in the design of the built environment. We're proud of that engagement, and draw a lot of energy from being out in community and sharing our passion.

Professionally, our staff is involved in a variety of industry-specific organizations, and make their expertise available on a range of issues, all the way up to the state level, with engagement in technical advisory groups.

Q: How would you sum up the firm's impact in Washington since opening the Seattle office?

A: I'd say we've had a positive impact on the built environment, with public essential facilities designed to serve throughout the Puget Sound region, from Bainbridge Island to Lynnwood to facilities for our communities in eastern Washington; and innovative, job-creating projects as well, including industrial work in Kent and cutting-edge projects such as Twelve in Moses Lake.

I think our volunteering is also important, though it's less visible than our projects. Part of our legacy will be in the impact we have on high school students and emerging professionals.

Finally, we've been committed to Seattle, and the downtown core, for 20 years. We've been in the Logan building that entire time, with multiple relocations and expansions, up to our most recent in 2022.

Q: What are some key things that make Mackenzie stand out from other design firms in the area?

A: Our in-house capabilities and vision of unified design set Mackenzie apart from traditional AE firms. The fact that we have so many diverse perspectives under one roof here in Seattle — architects, interior designers, civil and structural engineers, and land use planners — means we have a unique ability to provide creative solutions and find extra value for our clients. Through our work in a diverse range of sectors and project types, we also provide unique insight into regional economics and equitable development, an unusual specialty for design firms.



Recent projects include the Lynnwood Community Justice Center, which houses a new location for the Lynnwood Police Department.



The city of Everett tapped Mackenzie's Seattle office to design a host of renovations and improvements at its aging municipal building.

Images courtesy of Mackenzie

Q: What current/future projects are you most excited about?

A: I am excited for the Lynnwood Community Justice Center and Crisis Care Center. I'm also excited for our current work on the Everett Municipal Building, and providing a great new workplace for the people that serve that community. Twelve, a sustainable jet fuel innovator, is an exciting project with all kinds of interesting potential for the future. We've also assisted the Port of Seattle in initial design and planning for a reimagination of Terminal 91, which will have a direct impact on the local fishing industries.

Q: How are you and the office feeling on the occasion of Mackenzie's 20th anniversary?

A: We're thankful for the past couple of decades in Seattle, and a group of amazing clients, consultants, and contractor partners. Our relationships with them are a big part of our success here. I'm personally excited for the amazing next generation of talent we're bringing into our team, and growing our presence in Seattle together.

Q: How has the firm been celebrating?

A: We hosted an anniversary party at our

office to celebrate. It was a wonderful opportunity for our emerging young leaders to connect with longstanding clients, consultants, and all the diverse groups and firms with whom we work. The celebration was a way to support local small business vendors, express our community-oriented culture, and an avenue to give back through local charitable donations.

Q: What are some of your hopes for the firm's next 20 years?

A: We continue to double down on our investment and enthusiasm for Seattle and the Puget Sound region. We will grow our vibrant community relationships that have taken root in the time since we opened in 2004. There hasn't been a better time to be here: I am thrilled with our momentum, and the opportunities the future holds.

Mackenzie began in Portland in 1960 as a sole proprietorship, Tom Mackenzie, Consulting Engineer, and grew to Mackenzie Engineering, Incorporated in 1968. Architect Rick Saito joined the firm as a drafting intern in 1968 and partnered with Tom Mackenzie to form Mackenzie/Saito & Associates in 1977. The companies merged in 1996 and became Group Mackenzie. The firm was rebranded as Mackenzie in 2013.

The Vancouver office also opened in 2004.