Maureen Avolio Matthews ’88:
making it functional and attractive

Maureen Matthews owns Beehive, LLC in charm and beauty blessed Charleston, South Carolina. Since her facilities planning and interior design operation is always buzzing with productive activity, Beehive is an appropriate name. The efficient structure of the hive is also a good image for a professional whose work is focused on helping businesses create spaces where well-organized and attractive form does tend to follow and serve function.

Matthews had student experience in graphic arts and business before she zeroed in on interior design at Ursuline. She says that Art Professor Sr. Diane Pinchot, OSU, MFA, ’68 and former Ursuline faculty member Dr. Leslie Pina were particularly influential during her Pepper Pike years. But according to Matthews, her devotion to her alma mater is also based on a wide range of campus experience.

“In so many ways Ursuline was an oasis. The wonderful thing about the school is that the education is so personal. The size, the nurturing community, the mentoring opportunities, the fact that it is a women-focused institution all worked so well. I started as a part-time student, and they just bent over backward to get me financial aid to be full time and to tailor an educational program that met my needs. I just love the place.”

Before she, husband, Eric, and daughter Samantha migrated south at the turn of this century, Matthews was a force in Cleveland-area facilities planning. She began at the conglomerate Figgie International and was subsequently the head of facilities planning at American Greetings.

At the greeting card giant, Matthews was responsible for the visual grace and functional quality of one million square feet of corporate space, leading a “wonderful staff” of interior designers in the endless effort to make the space not only efficient but pleasing to the eye as well.

While working for American Greetings, Matthews offered internships to a number of Ursuline design students. Among them was Hillary Stone-Friedman ’96, now the College’s chair of interior design and historic preservation.

According to Matthews, one of the greatest things she gained from Ursuline was a solid grounding in the history and variety of interior design. A broad awareness of techniques and options is a primary tool employed in all her projects. Nevertheless, her largely commercial clientele tends to highly value the facilities planning portion of her skill set, so organizational creativity and sensitivity to the complexities of functionality are a vital part of all her projects.

“An ideal client is one who understands the process, the importance of the technical aspects, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements, building codes and safety issues. Many designers just pick stuff that looks pretty. I do a lot of work with the Veterans Administration (VA) hospital down here. I love working with them because they offer a welcoming environment and they understand the whole process,” said Matthews.

In addition, before she moved south, Matthews also had a stint as a manufacturer’s representative for a major carpet producer where she did most of her work for hospitals, colleges and corporations. After the migration, she decided to return to her strengths in planning and design. “Getting established in South Carolina was a mission accomplished in a couple of extremely hard working years,” Matthews said. “When I first started out, I had many days of intense work and nights where I would only get a few hours of sleep.”

She said the hardest part of running her business is finding competent collaborating vendors. “The best part is of my job is that I work for myself and have the freedom to create my own life, although I probably work twice as hard as I did when I was an employee.”

Matthews likes South Carolina but her connection to Ursuline remains strong: “At one time I was on their Interior Design Advisory Board. Now that I have the means to donate, I do. The school truly has been, and still is, a very important part of my life.”