

Birdwing  
Photo courtesy Tim Quigley

MINNESOTA CHAPTER  
OF THE SOCIETY OF  
ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS

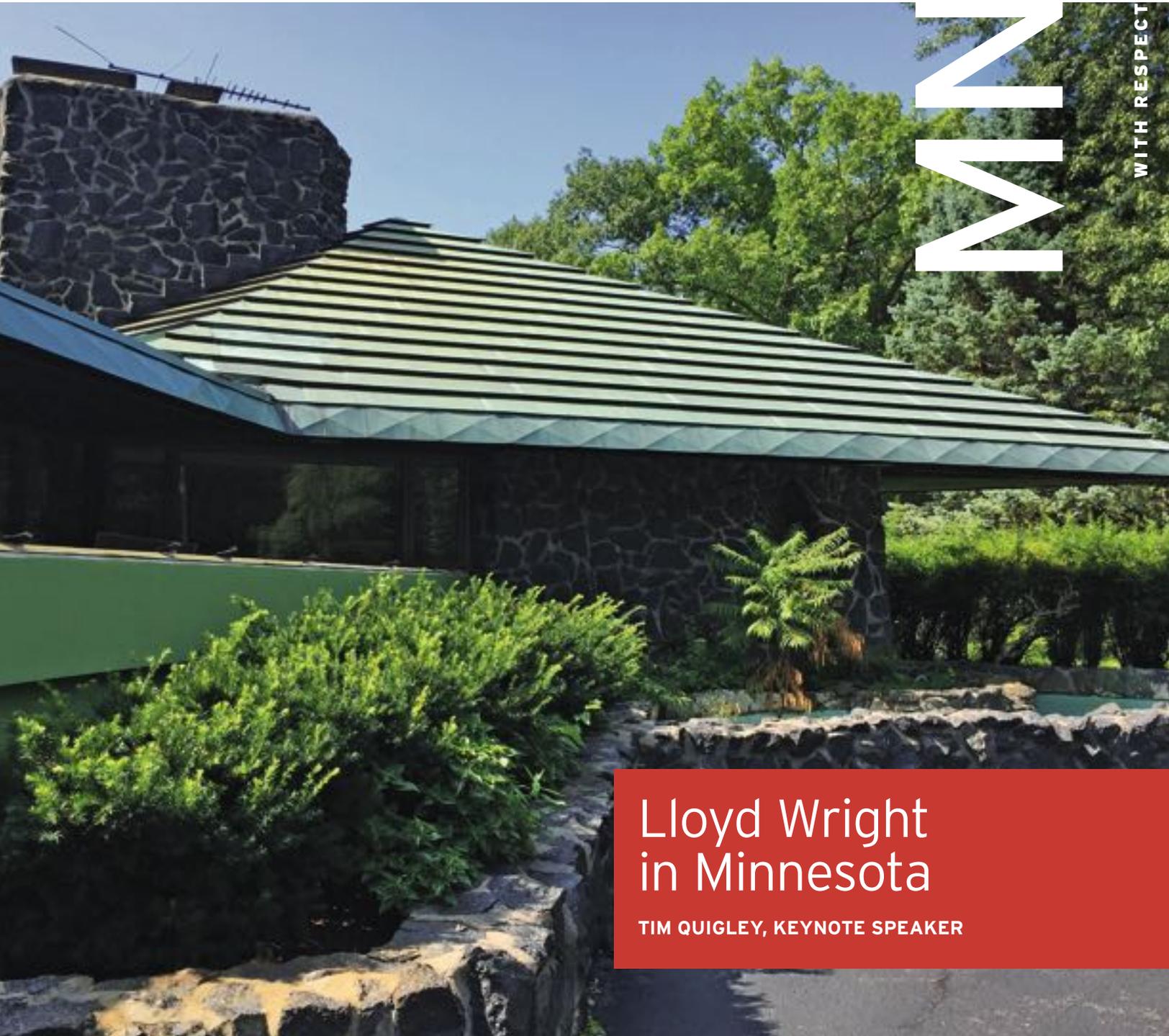
## MNSAH Annual Meeting

Presentation via Zoom

Wednesday, March 31, 2021, 7:00 p.m.

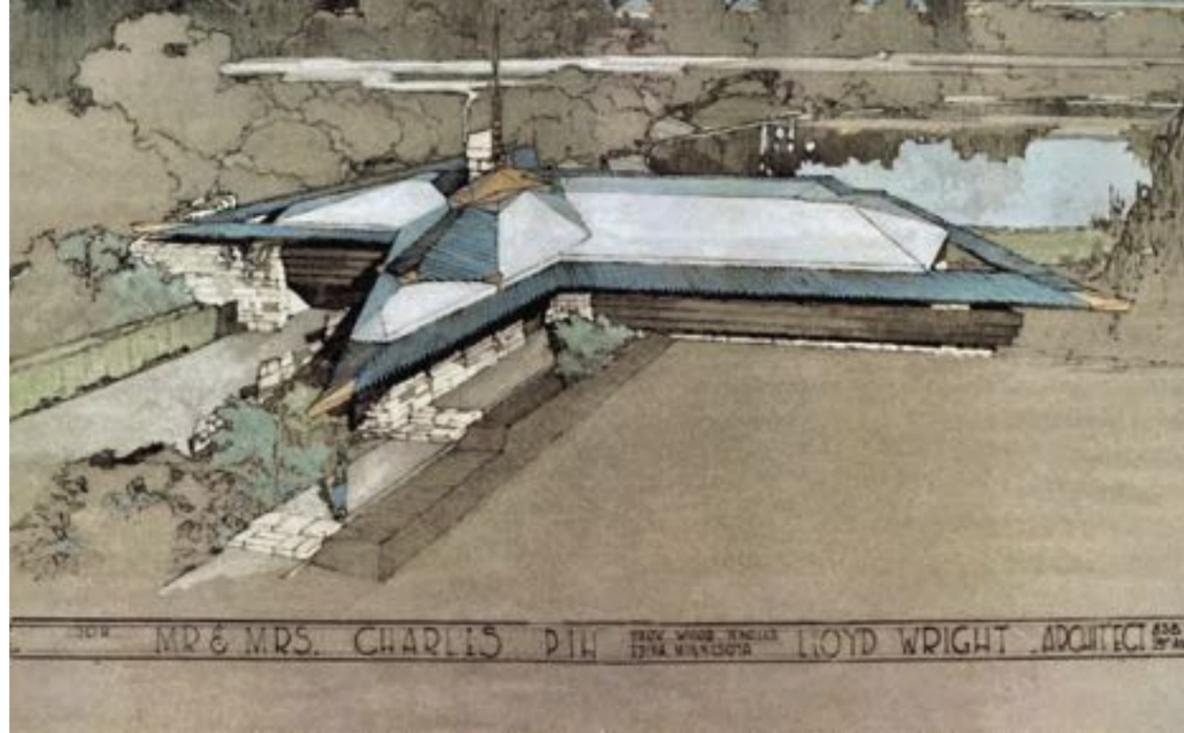
# MNSAH

WITH RESPECT TO ARCHITECTURE | MARCH 2021



Lloyd Wright  
in Minnesota

TIM QUIGLEY, KEYNOTE SPEAKER

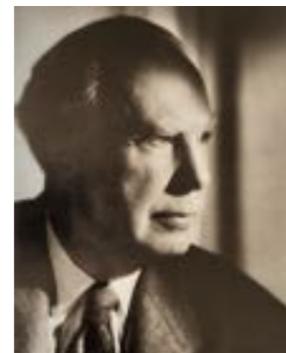


Photos and images courtesy Tim Quigley  
 Left: Rendering of Birdwing  
 Below left: Lloyd Wright  
 Below: Rendering of the Arthur Erickson House

## MNSAH Annual Meeting

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# Lloyd Wright in Minnesota

TIM QUIGLEY, KEYNOTE SPEAKER

This year's annual meeting keynote presentation features architect Tim Quigley, who will be speaking about the Minnesota work of Frank Lloyd Wright, Jr. (1890-1978), known as Lloyd Wright. Often confused with his more famous father, Lloyd Wright at one time assisted his father and worked on well-known projects including supervising the construction of the Hollyhock House in Los Angeles, where he established his own thriving architectural practice.

Tim will discuss how Lloyd Wright came to design multiple Minnesota projects, all for members of the Erickson family. He designed

homes for brothers Arthur and Alfred Erickson in the Parkwood Knolls area of Edina, and the related Pihl House in Minnetonka. Lloyd Wright's long career will be discussed in order to place the three houses within the context of his body of work.

Tim will also present the complex history of the 1961 Minnetonka house built for Charles Pihl and his wife Marjorie, who was a daughter of Arthur Erickson. Known as Birdwing, the expansive 6,500 square-foot house was built with stone, glass, and copper, and featured complex geometry. The house was located on an equally impressive

twelve-acre site, which was maintained with a park-like appearance. When it came time for the last owner, James Rupp, to sell the property, he was determined to find a preservation-minded buyer. But the house did not sell and in 2018 a developer proposed demolishing the house and subdividing the property. It appeared that preservation efforts were about to fail.

Fortunately, after national publicity about its impending demolition, a team from western Pennsylvania raced to Minnesota, dismantled all key elements of the house, packed them into shipping containers, and transported Birdwing to a site known as Polymath Park for eventual reassembly. Polymath Park is the vision of Thomas Papinchak, who had previously purchased the 130-acre property, which already contained two houses designed by Wright apprentice Peter Berndtson, and became a champion for the preservation of Wrightian buildings slated for demolition. In 2015, he saved Frank Lloyd Wright's Lindholm House in Cloquet from demolition and reassembled the house at

Polymath Park. Once reassembled, Birdwing, like the Lindholm House, will be available for tours and overnight lodging.

Finally, Tim will describe the new setting for these relocated Minnesota houses in Polymath Park, a fitting location not far from Frank Lloyd Wright's famous Fallingwater House.



**Tim Quigley** is principal of Quigley Architects, a Minneapolis residential firm specializing in single-family residential work for 25+ years. He is a former board president and current board member of the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy, former board vice president (and founder) of the Minnesota chapter of Docomomo and former board president of the Goldstein Museum of Design at the University of Minnesota. He is co-author of *John H. Howe, Architect: From Taliesin Apprentice to Master of Organic Design*,

published by the University of Minnesota Press. Previously, Tim taught architectural studio and history courses for twenty years as an assistant professor at the University of Minnesota and Ball State University. Most recently, he has tried, and failed, at retirement.



REGISTER FOR MNSAH'S **Annual Meeting** AT [WWW.MNSAH.ORG/EVENTS/ANNUAL-MEETING](http://WWW.MNSAH.ORG/EVENTS/ANNUAL-MEETING)

# Cass Gilbert and the Saint Paul Seminary



Left: Loras Hall, ca. 1900. MNHS Photo  
 Below left: Loras Hall. Photo Marjorie Pearson  
 Below left: Aerial view, ca. 1921. Photo MNHS  
 Below right: Administration Building, ca. 1900. Photo MNHS  
 Right: Sanborn Insurance Map of the St. Paul Seminary Campus, 1903.



**MARJORIE PEARSON, PH.D.**

*In January 2021, Marjorie Pearson spoke to MNSAH about her research on Cass Gilbert and the Saint Paul Seminary. As a follow-up to her talk, Marjorie prepared this summary of her findings. Unfortunately, the University of St. Thomas is planning to demolish Loras Hall, one of the Gilbert-designed buildings. Information about this preservation issue is found in the News from the Board column.*

In 1891, Cass Gilbert was commissioned by railroad magnate James J. Hill to develop plans for a new Saint Paul Seminary campus, located at the west edge of St. Paul, south of Summit Avenue, on 40 acres of land donated by Archbishop John

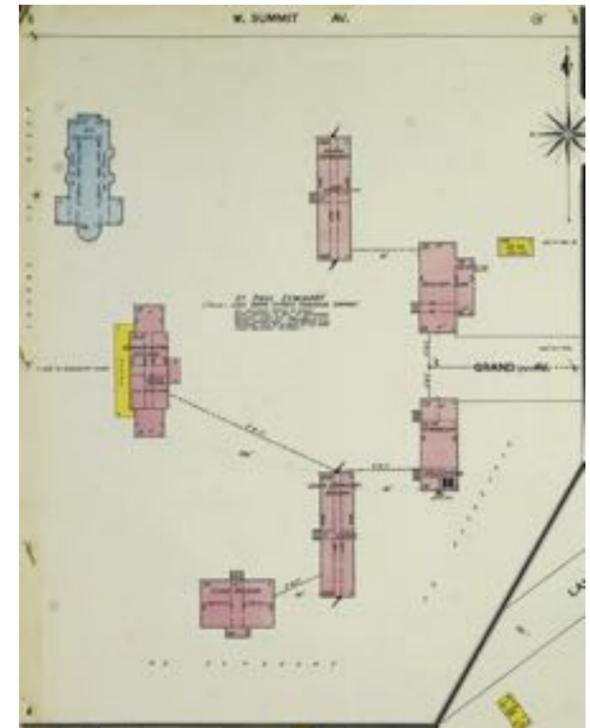
Ireland. Saint Paul Seminary and its buildings are an underappreciated part of Gilbert's career. It was the first of his educational complexes, it was his first project that involved several buildings on a site, and it incorporated a landscape plan. This project served as a precursor to his later highly regarded educational and institutional work. The new seminary revealed and tested the relationship among the three men in the course of its design and construction, and provided important lessons for Gilbert's career.

After a year at MIT, traveling in Europe, and working for McKim, Mead & White in New York, Gilbert returned to St. Paul in late 1882. He sought to build up his networks among the city's lawyers, bankers, merchants, and other business

leaders. In late 1884 or early 1885 he formed a partnership with James Knox Taylor, who had important family connections. The firm designed residences, churches, office blocks, and warehouses. The most notable of these was the Endicott Building on Robert Street, an elegant Italian Renaissance inspired design.

The firm of Gilbert & Taylor dissolved in 1892. Meanwhile Gilbert was cultivating his relationship with Hill as a means of gaining work. In September 1890, Hill announced that he was putting up \$500,000 for the construction and endowment of the Saint Paul Seminary. But it was not until 1891 that Hill was ready to proceed. He allotted about \$200,000 for construction and the remainder of the gift for an endowment that would be controlled by a trust under the supervision of Hill and his designated trustees.

It is likely that Gilbert lobbied Hill for the Saint Paul Seminary commission. It would be the largest and most complex of his career to date. Ireland was the ostensible client, but Hill controlled the purse strings and reviewed every aspect of the project. Gilbert biographer Geoffrey Blodgett explains that Gilbert toured the site with Ireland and developed preliminary sketches for the building and grounds that were shown to Hill in the fall of 1891. Hill told Gilbert that he was responsible to Hill, not Ireland, on all matters of design, construction, and cost. In December, when Gilbert and Ireland presented Hill with detailed plans, Hill rejected them to assert his control of the project. Gilbert wanted to quit, but Ireland dissuaded him.



Not only was the seminary Gilbert's first educational complex, it was also his first campus plan. He designed seven buildings, six of which were constructed within the constraints of Hill's budget. They included a centrally placed administration building on the axis of Grand Avenue, two symmetrically placed dormitories, a symmetrically placed refectory building and a gymnasium-power house flanking the Grand Avenue terminus, and a classroom building to the southwest of the South Dormitory. The chapel was not built until 1902-1904 to the designs of architect Clarence Johnston.

Not only was the seminary Gilbert's first educational complex, it was also his first campus plan.

*Continued on page 7*

# news FROM THE BOARD

Like MNSAH's annual meeting last fall, our Works in Progress program in January was held virtually for the first time. The result was record attendance! Our member Mimi Fisher joined us from California and former board member Patty Dean joined us from Montana. Others attended from throughout the country. We even connected with another Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) chapter--John Guenther, president of the St. Louis chapter, also joined us. Another first!

It was very gratifying that so many could attend the presentations by Emily Ganzel, who spoke on Roselawn Cemetery buildings designed by Thomas Holyoke; Renee Barnes, whose presentation featured the historic features of Minnesota's highway system; and Marjorie Pearson, who talked about Cass Gilbert's design of the St. Paul Seminary campus. The ability to connect virtually has provided us with many new opportunities!

As a follow-up to her talk at Works in Progress, Marjorie Pearson prepared the article on the St. Paul Seminary Campus, on page four, in which she discusses the history and importance of this Cass Gilbert-designed property. Unfortunately, the University



Loras Hall. Photo Martha Douglas

of St. Thomas, which now manages the property, is making plans to demolish one of the buildings, Loras Hall, originally known as the North Dormitory, in order to construct a new building on the site.

MNSAH has officially supported the preservation of Loras Hall. Not only is the building designed by Cass Gilbert, it is also located within the West Summit Avenue Historic District, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is also designated as a historic district by the City of St. Paul. We have been in contact with both the Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) and the city council. We stated our opposition to demolition and encouraged the city to request that St. Thomas explore options to locate their new building elsewhere on the property.

We supported the decision by the HPC to deny the request by St. Thomas for a demolition permit to raze Loras Hall; however, the decision was appealed to the city council, which approved the request for demolition by a vote of 6 to 1. Jane Prince was the only council member who voted against demolition. This action sets a very troubling precedent.

By the time you receive this newsletter, Loras Hall will have been demolished and the architectural heritage of perhaps the state's most famous architect will have been diminished.

In other news, *Elizabeth Scheu Close: A Life in Modern Architecture*, by Jane King Hession, and published by the University of Minnesota Press, is a finalist for this year's Minnesota Book Awards. Jane is a past president of MNSAH and a member of the Minnesota Modern Masters Committee. Congratulations Jane!!

We were pleased to have had a virtual introduction to Amanda Roth Clark, the new SAH liaison with the local chapters. Amanda is the past president of the Pacific Northwest chapter of SAH, and she teaches art history at Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington. We thank our prior liaison, Virginia Price, for all the assistance that she had given us, and look forward to working closely with Amanda. We welcome Amanda to MNSAH!

**ROLF ANDERSON**  
PRESIDENT

## MNSAH 2021 Nominating Committee Report

MNSAH members who attend the annual meeting on March 31, 2021 will vote on the following slate of officers and board members submitted by the nominating committee (Rolf Anderson, Dennis Gimmestad, Bob Frame, and Barb Bezat). New board nominations may come from the floor.

All officers are nominated for a one-year term. Board members Dennis Gimmestad and Martha Douglas are nominated for an additional two-year term. The remaining board members will be serving the second year of the two-year term to which they were elected in 2020.

<b>PRESIDENT</b>	ROLF ANDERSON
<b>VICE PRESIDENT</b>	DENNIS GIMMESTAD
<b>TREASURER</b>	BOB FRAME
<b>SECRETARY</b>	BARB BEZAT
<b>AT LARGE</b>	RENEE BARNES MARTHA DOUGLAS GREG GAUT GARY REETZ MATT SELTZER

## Cass Gilbert and the Saint Paul Seminary

*Continued from page 5*

Each of the six buildings was constructed of brick with a red sandstone base. The red pressed brick walls with arched openings rose to hipped roofs clad with slate. The roofs of the two dormitory buildings were punctuated by hipped-roof dormers. The substantial buildings had wide arched doorway openings approached by broad steps. The three-story administration building had a one-story porch that extended across the front of the building. The dormitory buildings (later renamed Loras Hall and Cretin Hall) were notable for their arrangement of rooms for the seminarians. Each of the floors has a central corridor with brick walls and the rooms set against the outside walls. An open central staircase with cast and wrought-iron railings rises the height of each dormitory building. Unlike most seminaries, St. Paul gave each seminarian a two-room suite with one room for sleeping and another for study. The gymnasium building has a main hall with a wood-paneled ceiling and a truss system for roof support.

Construction of the seminary began in 1892 and was completed three years later. The dedication took place on September 4, 1895, with 20,000 people in attendance.

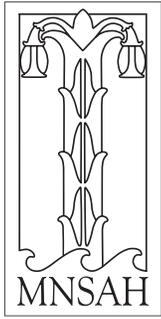
Perhaps because of his soured relations with Hill, Gilbert never extolled his Saint Paul Seminary work. Because of Hill's requirements, the buildings are more comparable to Gilbert's warehouse designs and railroad depots than many of his later academic works. However, that difference does not diminish their quality and presence on the campus. The seminary community called the administration building "Hill's train station" and the dormitories "Hill's boxcars." They have been described as "utilitarian and lacking in ornamentation." Blodgett, by contrast, states that "those that survive reach well beyond the ordinary in proportion and minimalist dignity." Such a sentiment finds resonance in the twenty-first century. Today only three of Gilbert's six buildings survive: the two dormitories and the gymnasium-power house.

### SELECTED REFERENCES

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105 5TH AVENUE SOUTH  
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MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55401

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Lindholm House relocated from Cloquet to Polymath Park  
Photo courtesy Tim Quigley