



William R. Frizzell

**William Raymond “Bill” Frizzell** was born September 29, 1929, in Punta Gorda, Charlotte County, Florida. After graduating from Florida Military Academy in St. Petersburg in 1947, he attended Georgia Tech, where he graduated in 1952 and 1953 with degrees in engineering and architecture. He did drafting and design work for several architectural and engineering firms in Atlanta and then joined Tampa architect Mark Hampton as an architectural draftsman. He returned to Fort Myers in 1955 to become a partner with the local architect Bolton McBryde, forming McBryde & Frizzell, Architects.

In 1965, he struck out on his own, in competition with his former partner. He built his architectural design firm, William R. Frizzell Architects, Inc., into a multi-million-dollar business with offices in Fort Myers, Winter Park, and Daytona Beach. With 40 engineers and architects, it became one of the largest architectural firms in Florida, and by far the largest Fort Myers-based firm in its field.

His associates saw him as an unusual but effective combination of artist and businessman, who not only designed buildings but also negotiated contracts, oversaw design work and was socially adept at making the necessary contacts.

Bill’s firm designed many of the schools built in the 1960s and 1970s in Southwest Florida, including Riverdale High School, Cypress Lake High and Middle Schools, Gulf Elementary and Middle Schools, Pelican Elementary, Cape Coral Elementary, Suncoast Elementary and Middle Schools, Lehigh Acres Elementary School, Fort Myers Middle School and Lee Middle School. Former Lee County Superintendent of Schools Ray Pottorf says that Bill was especially pleased with Gulf Middle and Elementary Schools in Cape Coral. Pottorf says Bill was different from most architects he worked with because Bill wanted to look at the functions of a room and who it would serve before the building was designed. “Bill would have us draw circles before a building was designed to show what functions we wanted near each other. He would then design the building to help the people who worked in the building accomplish their goals. Bill could see the other person’s point of view. He was exceptionally creative but practical as well.”

Bill loved to travel and absorb ideas for building designs. Leigh Frizzell Hayes says one of her favorites of her father’s buildings is the former Lee County Schools Administration building. “Dad brought ideas back from Greece for the outside deck and terracing. The building was so attractive with plants on the terraces back in its heyday. ... Dad’s buildings had a sense of style. I could usually tell when I saw a building if it was a Frizzell building. Many had flat roofs, and it was extremely important to Dad that the buildings meld into the environment. He was certainly influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe.”



Tyler Frizzell says part of his father's lasting legacy is the homes he built. Tyler especially likes Oscar and Wilhelmina Corbin's house at 1306 Shadow Lane, which Bill designed in the 1950s and where the Corbins still live more than 50 years later, as well as two other houses on Shadow Lane: one built for Dr. Tom Wiley now owned by Woody Hanson, and the other built for Dr. Roger Scott and now owned by Joe and Sydney D'Alessandro. All look good and have withstood the test of time.

As well as beautiful houses on Sanibel and Captiva and elsewhere in Lee County, Bill also designed side-by-side houses for Charlotte Bever and her friend at 1303 and 1309 Cordova Avenue, Fort Myers. Bill upset the neighborhood with such modern designs in the 1950s. Finally, Charlotte, who owned B&B Grocery Stores, had to tell her neighbors, including the Coca Cola distributor, that she did not need to sell their products in her grocery stores. The objections stopped!

In addition to his architectural work, Bill was a prominent member of the Fort Myers Rotary Club, a former Commodore of the Royal Palm Yacht Club, a director of First Federal Savings and Loan Association of Fort Myers, on the Salvation Army board, active in the Boys Scouts as an Eagle Scout and Order of the Arrow (he also designed the Boy Scout camp near Arcadia), and an active member of the First Presbyterian Church in downtown Fort Myers. Bill loved beauty and he loved the water. He and John Kontinos donated the property to Lee Co. for the Frizzell-Kontinos Boat Ramp at Punta Rassa.



Bill Frizzell died, tragically, in a private plane crash on November 21, 1978, on approach to Daytona Beach, where he was to meet with representatives from Daytona Beach Community College, for whom his firm had drawn up plans for millions of dollars' worth of campus buildings. He was 49. Bill's obituary, written by Barbara Harris and published in the Fort Myers News-Press on November 23, 1978, two days after his unexpected and premature death, gives a clear picture of the respect his friends and business associates had for him:

One can look in almost any corner of Lee County and see how architect and developer William R. Frizzell influenced the county, although no building, street or development bears his name. "He wasn't the kind of person to name something after himself," said George Bail, a partner in W.R. Frizzell Architects Inc. "He was interested in accomplishments, not personal glory."

News of the tragic death Tuesday evening of Frizzell, 49, in an airplane crash near Daytona Beach stunned the business community, which held Frizzell in high esteem. Many lunchtime conversations Wednesday centered on his life and his achievements, area businessmen said.

His accomplishments were many. He designed the Lee County School Board's administration and service complex, many of the schools in Southwest Florida, the Fort Myers Public Library, Fort Myers City Hall, Lee County Bank, the News-Press, several buildings at Edison Community College, Sunset Condominiums (the first condominium complex on Sanibel Island), First Federal Savings and Loan's new office building downtown and dozens of other buildings and developments in Southwest Florida, the state and around the country.

"He's left his mark all over the state of Florida and further because of his contribution," said Hart McIntyre, of Prather's Laundry and Dry Cleaning and a close friend of Frizzell. "Bill Frizzell had more talent in his little finger than 10 men put together," McIntyre added.

Frizzell, born in 1929 in Punta Gorda, was described by friends and associates as an artist, a businessman, a compassionate person and a visionary. He received degrees in engineering and architecture from the Georgia Institute of Technology and did drafting and design work in Atlanta and Tampa before returning to Fort Myers in 1955. That year, Frizzell became a partner with Fort Myers architect Bolton McBryde. Ten years after, he struck out on his own. Competing with his former partner, he nurtured his architectural design firm into a multi-million-dollar business with offices in Fort Myers, Winter Park and Daytona Beach.

Under his direction, W.R. Frizzell Architects, with 40 engineers and architects, became the largest Fort Myers-based firm in its field. "The other architects in town only got the crumbs when Bill got through with them," Ed Kreider of the Five County Builders and Contractors Association said of Frizzell's ability to win contracts. "You look around town, and he's the one who has designed almost everything. Most of the biggest projects were his." It was Frizzell, with "an unusual combination of talent as an artist and businessman," who built the firm – negotiating contracts, overseeing design work and making necessary contacts. "A lot of people are anti-development and growth," said his daughter Leigh. "But whenever Dad did something, he did it right."

Foster Pate, president of Pate Industries and part owner with Frizzell and McIntyre of the six-seat Cessna in which Frizzell was killed, said, "Bill was truly a Christian person – in the sense of looking out for the other man and the environment." "He was always concerned about whether a development was compatible with the environment in which it would be located." Many business leaders attribute his success, not only to his talent as an engineer, architect and businessman, but also to his personality and his progressive thinking. "I was saying at lunch today (Wednesday) that it wasn't only Bill's design work, but his perceptions of the business world," said friend and business partner Oscar Corbin Jr. "Bill was a forward thinker. He always looked beyond the here and now and was able to see what was going to happen in the future."

And Dan Adams commented, "He was a mild-mannered person, the kind who put you ease when you had to discuss a difficult subject." "He got involved with what you were doing and saying. He was a good listener." Frizzell's influence is felt in many other ways, his associates said. "Bill was not only involved as an architect, but in many cases took his fees in the form of a piece of the development," Adams said.

He was a prominent member of the Fort Myers Rotary Club, a former Commodore of the Royal Palm Yacht Club, a director of First Federal Savings and Loan Association of Fort Myers, as well as many other businesses. Frizzell – survived by his wife, Margaret, his 23-year-old daughter Leigh, and 19-year-old son Tyler – spent the few hours that he wasn't working, on his boat, Leigh Frizzell said.

Ray Pottorf, in a recent letter to Bill's daughter Leigh, is eloquent in his esteem for her father, and speaks for many of Bill's associates, customers, and friends:

I must speak of your Dad's personal characteristics: foremost was integrity. The credibility of your Dad and his firm's success came from the inseparable personal and professional qualities demonstrated reliably over time and experience. Your Dad's unpretentious, genial, even sometimes humorously self-demeaning manner might easily belie an unknowing person of a highly intelligent, exceptionally talented professional, totally dedicated and committed to applying his immense ability to the fullest extent to each new project.

Your Dad had a rare ability to communicate with equal respect to every level of the broad spectrum of individuals that architects encounter by the very nature of their work. Drawing on his "grass roots" experience, professional preparation and an enviable personal likeability, he easily elicited mutual respect in all encounters, greatly benefiting the quality and the expeditious completion of projects.

Knowing him is considered an irreplaceable highlight in my life.

In 1992, the Lee County Commission named the William R. Frizzell Cultural Centre at McGregor and Colonial in Fort Myers, which houses the Alliance for the Arts, in Bill's memory. The building was

designed by Gora McGahey, Architects. In 2009, naming Bill as one of their list of “125 most influential people in Southwest Florida history”, the Fort Myers News-Press noted: “The architect’s legacy is evident throughout Lee County even now, 31 years after he died in a plane crash ...”.

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Bill married Margaret Morrow in Atlanta on January 3, 1952. Margaret was born on November 30, 1926, in Flushing, New York. She graduated from Ward-Belmont College in Nashville (now Belmont University) and was licensed in Medical Technology from Emory University in Atlanta. Bill and Margaret had two children: daughter Leigh, born 1955, and son Roy Tyler, born 1959.

Margaret died on May 18, 1998, in Fort Myers, and the newly renovated outdoor stage at the Alliance for the Arts complex was renamed in her honor as the Margaret Morrow Frizzell Amphitheatre.



Margaret (Morrow) Frizzell

Leigh graduated from Pine Crest School, Fort Lauderdale, in 1973, received her BA from Indiana University, her MA from the University of South Florida and her JD from Emory University in Atlanta. She married William Wark Hayes, originally from Pennsylvania, on October 7, 1989, in Fort Myers.



Leigh, Bill, Margaret, Tyler, about 1965

Bill Hayes died in April, 2006. Leigh Frizzell Hayes has served as a Lee County Judge since 1997.

Roy Tyler Frizzell graduated from Pine Crest School, Fort Lauderdale, in 1977, received his BS from Duke University, and his MD and PhD from Vanderbilt University. He married Barbara Andrews in 1985, and is now a neurosurgeon in Boise, Idaho. He and Barbara have five children.

Bill Frizzell’s was a pioneer family in Southwest Florida. Bill’s parents were Roy S. Frizzell, born August 17, 1907, in Calhoun County, Alabama, and Sarah Thompson, born August 11, 1907, in Georgia. They married in 1928, and settled just outside Punta Gorda, where Roy managed a grocery store, and son Bill was born. Five years later, still in the Punta Gorda area, Roy had become manager of a service station. By 1945, they had moved into Fort Myers, living at 921 West Edison, and Roy operated Frizzell Lumber Company. Two years later, he was listed as operating Frizzell Hardware & Supply Company. Together with his brother A.C. Frizzell, Bill’s father owned Frizzell Lincoln Mercury, and designing its new building on Fowler Street in the 1950s was one of Bill’s earliest projects.

Roy died in August 1958, and is buried at Charlotte Harbor Cemetery. In August 1961, Sarah married William Dius Roberts. Dius died March 4, 1988, and Sarah died March 23, 1993, and they are both buried in the Friendship Baptist Church Cemetery, Immokalee.

Bill Frizzell's grandfather on his father's side was Joseph Johnson Frizzell, who was born on April 16, 1866, in Calhoun County, Alabama, and died on October 20, 1926, in Charlotte County, Florida. His grandmother was Blanche Mozelle Howell, who was born on November 4, 1870, in Alexander, Calhoun County, Alabama, and died on November 1, 1948, in Lee Memorial Hospital, Fort Myers. At the time of her death, she lived in Punta Gorda. Joseph and Blanche married on December 28, 1886, in Anniston, Calhoun County, Alabama. They had seven children – the eldest was born in 1887, and the youngest was born in 1913. Roy was the sixth child, born in 1907. Many of the family moved to Charlotte County in the 1920s to work for the railroad. Bill's uncle A.C. Frizzell later owned much of what is now known as Port Charlotte.

Margaret's parents were John Albert Morrow, born January 22, 1883, in Madison County, Florida, and Margaret Rose Coyne, born June 11, 1884, in East Orange, New Jersey. They married on January 22, 1910, and lived at Palmetto Avenue in Green Cove Springs, Florida, where John was a Methodist minister. In 1918, they were living in Emory, Virginia, and John was a teacher. With WWI still in progress, John applied to be sent to France with the AEF, working for the YMCA. On his passport application, he was described as "height 5 ft. 11 in., high forehead, light blue eyes, straight nose, large mouth, medium chin, brown hair, fair complexion, and medium-oval face".

By 1920, the Morrow family was living at 1250 West Main Street, Charlottesville, Virginia, where John taught at a city school. Having obtained his BA in chemistry from Emory and Henry College, he attended the University of Virginia, and in 1923 was a teaching fellow in chemistry with an MA. While at Virginia, John composed the official alma mater of the University, "Virginia, Hail, All Hail". After teaching mathematics at Washington Square College (now New York University) between 1923 and 1930, he obtained a PhD from the University of Florida in Gainesville. In the 1940s, John taught chemistry at Ward-Belmont College in Nashville. John and Margaret had three children: John Calhoun, born February 28, 1912, in Virginia; Robert Kendall, born January 15, 1924, in New York, and Margaret, born November 30, 1926, in Flushing, New York. John Albert died on February 8, 1949, in Nashville; Margaret Rose, who had moved to Gainesville after John's death, moved back to Nashville to live with her son Calhoun, and died there on February 1, 1963.

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W.R. Frizzell Architects, Inc., with offices in Fort Myers, West Palm Beach, Orlando, and Naples, has completed more than 1000 projects, not only in Southwest Florida, but elsewhere in Florida and around the country. Some notable local buildings designed by Bill and his firm are:

- The Bever Residences, Cordova Avenue, Fort Myers
- Lee County School Board's administration and service complex
- Fort Myers Public Library
- Fort Myers City Hall
- Lee County Bank
- Fort Myers News-Press Building
- Sunset South Condominiums (the first condominium complex on Sanibel Island)
- Buccaneer Estates mobile home park in North Fort Myers
- First Federal Savings and Loan's new office building in downtown Fort Myers
- Many of the schools in Southwest Florida
- Several buildings at Edison Community College (in conjunction with McBryde Architects)

The following are some of the most notable works of Bill's, of McBryde & Frizzell (up to 1965), and of W.R. Frizzell Architects:



#### **Roy and Sarah Frizzell Residence, 1950**

According to Leigh Frizzell Hayes, Bill designed this house, at 1462 El Prado Avenue, Fort Myers, for his parents. This was in 1950, while Bill was at Georgia Tech., and Bill and family moved there in the late 50s, after his father died.

On April 10, 1969, the Frizzells sold the property to Cecil and Mary Waldron.

The ranch style home has 1 story, 2,690 sq. ft., 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, and a finished garage.



#### **News-Press Complex, 1955-1964**

A low warehouse with a loading dock, at the southwest corner of the property, behind the fire station, was built in 1955. The building for the industrial parts (presses, storage, etc.) was designed by McBryde & Frizzell and built in 1960. It is at the back (south) of the property, along the railroad track. It is a high-bay production building, housing the big presses. The ceiling is very high – about 20 ft. – with plenty of room for a mezzanine in part of it.

The 1-story office building was designed by McBryde & Frizzell and built in 1964. It is the low middle building on MLK Boulevard. The 2-story building on the east side, nearest to Fowler and the parking lot, was designed by Ted McGee and built in the late 1970s or the 1980s. The 2-story building with the News-Press name on it was designed by Parker Mudgett Smith and built in 2002.



#### **Roediger Residence, 1957**

This house, at 1303 Cordova Avenue, Fort Myers, was built for Laura H. Roediger, a friend of Charlotte Bever.

The house has 2,294 sq. ft., 1 story, 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, a finished garage, a finished screened porch, and a finished enclosure at ground level and along the west side of the house next to Valencia Way.



### **Bever Residence, 1957**

One of the two “Bever Houses” (the Roediger Residence above being the other), this house, at 1309 Cordova Ave., Fort Myers, was built for Charlotte Bever.

The house has 2,478 sq. ft., 1 story, 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, a finished carport, and 3 finished screened porches.



### **Corbin residence, 1957**

This house, at 1306 Shadow Lane, Fort Myers, was built for Oscar M. Corbin Jr. and his wife, Mina. At that time, they ran Corbin’s Farm Supply in downtown Fort Myers, at the corner of Main and Monroe. Oscar was Mayor of Fort Myers, from 1967 to 1976.

The house has 4,351 sq. ft., 1 story, 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, and a finished carport.



### **Sunset South Condominiums, 1969**

This project, at 1341 Middle Gulf Drive, Sanibel, was the first condominium complex on Sanibel Island.

There were 3 buildings in Phase 1, built for Sanibel Development Corporation. Each building has 4 units. Each unit has 1,150 sq. ft., 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, and an under-building garage.



### **Lee County Bank Building, 1972**

Attributed to Ray Jensen at Frizzell Architects, this 2-story building has about 7,000 sq. ft. It has offices upstairs and drive-thru banking facilities at the ground level. Bill's office was upstairs in the 1970s.



### **Buccaneer Estates, 1974**

Frizzell was responsible for the layout of this mobile home park in North Fort Myers, as well as for its single-story clubhouse.



### **Fort Myers City Hall, 1974**

This product of W.R. Frizzell Architects, at 2200 Second Street, Fort Myers, is a 4-story building with 39,031 sq. ft. There is an ornamental pool in front of the building – also dating from 1974.





### **Lee County School Administration Building, 1976**

The Lee County District School Board Administration Center is at 2055 Central Ave., Fort Myers.

The 3-story building has 57,997 sq. ft. The property is currently for sale.



### **First Federal Savings & Loan Building, 1977**

This 6-story, 74,360 sq. ft. building, at 2201 Second Street, is a product of Frizzell Architects, Ray Jensen Designer, and Ted McGee Project Architect.

It was sold in September 2006 to Lee County.

According to Ted McGee, “Ray Jensen and I were the design team and Ray's concept was chosen. I then became the Project Architect and ultimately the Architect-of-Record and Clerk-of-the-Works during construction. I was responsible for developing the

schematic design, preliminary design, construction documents and bidding of the project.”

“It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be involved with a project encompassing an entire city block bounded by the Frizzell-designed City Hall, the original County Court House, the Gundersen & Wilson-designed Court House Annex, the Richards and Robb & Stucky buildings on the East, and linking to downtown through the Patio de Leon.”

“The design oriented the building such that no glazed surfaces are exposed to direct sunlight between 10am and 3pm on any given day through the use of solar shading devices on the East, South and West facades. Senior management and the Board Room were located on the top floor along with a full kitchen, dining area and community room. ... There is a time capsule located on the ground floor at the entrance to the elevators which was placed there as part of the dedication ceremonies in 1976. H. D. Rutledge & Son was the General Contractor with Jimmie Rutledge being the main contact person.”



### Fort Myers Public Library, 1980

The Library, at 2050 Central Ave., Fort Myers, is a single-story building with 22,790 sq. ft.

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Photos of Bill and Margaret Frizzell and family courtesy of Leigh Frizzell Hayes

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