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Joyce Nesnadny and Mark Schwartz have come a long way since their first annual report six years ago.

Graphics firm duo hits annual report stride

BY BARBARA MOONEY

Photographer Mark Schwartz and graphic designer Joyce Nesnadny got their big break in the corporate annual report big leagues thanks to what Mr. Schwartz called a "leap in faith" by Progressive Corp. president and CEO Peter Lewis.

That was six years ago. The two haven't looked back since.

Indeed, Mr. Schwartz and Ms. Nesnadny have come a long way since they collaborated on their first annual report, which was done in 1983 for University Circle Inc. and a few months later the pair put together the first of six annual reports for Progressive.

At the time, Mr. Schwartz was teaching photography at local universities and Ms. Nesnadny was a designer for the Regional Transit Authority. They worked on the annual report in their spare time.

Today, their graphic design firm, Nesnadny + Schwartz, is one of the region's largest, with 10 employees housed in a renovated mansion on Magnolia Drive in University Circle. Billings for 1988 for the firm totaled \$1.6 million.

The firm also has collected a number of awards, most recently from the International Association of Business Communicators, which has selected the firm's work for two 1989 Gold Quill awards.

But it was the assignment in 1983 for Progressive, a property and casualty insurer, which gave them the chance to start their own firm, Mr. Schwartz said.

The relationship with Progressive has been a good one. The firm's work on Progressive's 1987 annual report has won four national honors. In addition, for its design and photography of brochures for Progressive and Booz, Allen & Hamilton Corp.'s 1987 annual report, the firm has

won a number of local awards in the last year.

The Cleveland Advertising Club picked the firm for four ADDY Awards; the Cleveland Society for Communication Arts awarded it a total of five medals, and at the IABC's District 7 competition, the firm picked up four awards.

The firm's sixth Progressive annual report was released last month. As in past years, the report emphasizes the company's extensive contemporary art collection. It also displays a more distinctive design than is found in most corporate annual reports.

In addition to information presented in traditional format, disembodied messages make up part of the text. Images are repeated in a variety of forms throughout the book. And the artwork Progressive traditionally presents in its annual reports is presented in the book against backdrops of blown-up dictionary entries of words such as "individuality," "flexibility," "risk" and "vision" that are used symbolically throughout the book.

This year's Progressive annual report was more of a strain than usual, because Ms. Nesnadny was away at Yale University, where she will receive a master of fine arts degree this June.

"We did the annual by long-distance," Mr. Schwartz said. "It was a very intense project."

Mr. Schwartz and Ms. Nesnadny said the pride they have in their work is based on their own meticulousness. "We're always harder on ourselves than the client is," Mr. Schwartz said.

The proficiency of Nesnadny + Schwartz has kept Progressive a happy client.

"If you look at the reports in sequence, I think you'll see that they get progressively better," said Mr. Lewis, who first met the pair through the Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art.

"They were obviously committed and eager to extend themselves," Mr. Lewis said.

Although noted for its annual report work with such companies as Progressive, Parker Hannifin and Waxman Industries Inc., the photography and design firm has been getting more involved in other areas, Mr. Schwartz said.

For instance, the firm designed a corporate identification program for International Asset Management Inc. When Jacobs, Visconsi, & Jacobs Co. unveiled the model of the Ameritrust Center last year, Nesnadny + Schwartz designed a poster to accompany the presentation. JVI also called on the firm to design the invitation for the groundbreaking ceremony of the Society Center.

And now the firm's work can be seen by a wider audience outside the business community. In last month's premiere issue of C-Style, a magazine supplement of Sun Newspapers, publisher Lute Harmon acknowledged both Mr. Schwartz and Okey Nestor, a designer with the firm, for having "used their considerable talents in designing and art directing the publication."