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Headline grabber: \$30M headquarters for Columbian

Portland Business Journal - June 29, 2007 by [David Raths](#) Special to the Business Journal
A building that will stand the test of time.

That's what Scott Campbell, publisher of The Columbian, wanted for the daily newspaper's new \$30 million headquarters building in downtown Vancouver. And he's confident that Portland's GBD Architects has delivered exactly what he was looking for.

Campbell said the design of the six-story building, which features a glass two-story pavilion as the main lobby, has exceeded his expectations.

"I would say it is built to last, unlike some buildings, which look like they are built to be flipped in four or five years. It's not trendy."

Four floors of the 80,000-square-foot building, located on Sixth Street between Esther and Columbia streets, will house Columbian news, advertising, circulation and administrative staff. The top two floors will be leased to office tenants, and 5,000 square feet of ground-floor space is available for retail use. The building will open this fall.

Campbell called the decision to stay in downtown Vancouver an easy one. At one time, he had considered an alternative site, 13 acres at the corner of Grand Avenue and Highway 14, but he noted that "downtown is a much more desirable location for our employees. This building gives us the flexibility to use the office space as needed. We can expand over time into upper floors, or if we consolidate, we can use less space."

Campbell and his wife, Jody, hired Portland-based Gerding Edlen Development Co. LLC, known for its work in the Pearl District, to act as the office building project manager, and Howard S. Wright Construction as general contractor.

GBD officials say the newspaper's new home will help connect the Esther Shore Park neighborhood to the Columbia River.

GBD, well known for Portland developments such as the Brewery Blocks, Museum Place and South Waterfront, also has drawn up second-phase plans for construction of a printing press building situated across Esther Street from the offices, but that project may be several years down the road, Campbell said.

The move is expected to improve work flow for the paper's 360-employee work force, which had outgrown its current digs at 701 W. Eighth St. The Columbian's current headquarters, built in 1955, grew from a single, 23,000-square-foot building to two buildings with more than 110,000 square feet.

Now, "we'll all be in the same building, so it will be easier to communicate," Campbell said. "The view is spectacular, and the work spaces are much more people-friendly with lots of natural light and sophisticated lighting controls. The employees are coming from spaces with huge rooms that have no sunlight whatsoever."

One of the design challenges, said Keith Skille, GBD's project manager, was to retain the sense of community between departments as they move from one-story buildings to separate floors of a tower.

"We created an interior stairway linking the floors," he said, and used the same materials and finishes to tie the floors together.

Those finishes include decorative steel stairs and guardrails, cherry millwork, wood and metal ceilings, and slate flooring.

Skille called the large public space at the entry the heart of the newspaper.

"There's a fireplace there," he said, "so there is a very Northwest feel to it."

The lobby will feature an interactive multimedia display describing significant events in the history of the newspaper and Southwest Washington. The pavilion's rooftop features a terrace and garden for use by the building's occupants.

The building is in a prominent location in an area undergoing a significant renaissance, including the recent addition of the Vancouver Convention Center and Hilton Hotel. Yet Skille said GBD responded to Campbell's desire for the Columbian building to fit into the community, rather than stand out. The facade features pre-cast brick and composite metal panels.

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"The building is not showy," Skille said. "It is solid. It has an institutional character like on a college campus. They wanted the look to say Vancouver."

Saying Vancouver meant focusing on details such as brick color. There used to be a well-known brick company in the area called Hidden Brick Co. which manufactured product identified as Vancouver red brick.

"We were able to find a brick color that matched that," Skille said. "They want the building to say they belong to the community."

Though the exterior speaks of tradition, the building also rides the current wave of sustainable development, an area in which GBD has considerable experience. Among the environmentally sensitive features is the building's cooling and heating system, which is handled by groundwater pumped from an aquifer. Ron Edgerton, a project executive at Howard S. Wright in Portland, called the system "state of the art" in terms of conservation.

Skille said the building, which is 40 percent more energy efficient than code requires, is expected to earn LEED Gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. The building features water-efficient landscaping and fixtures. It uses low-toxicity paints and wood products. The construction team of Howard S. Wright put an emphasis on the use of recycled local material, and 95 percent of construction waste is recycled.

Campbell was interested in the sustainable elements as long as they didn't bust the budget.

"We were willing to take on some front-loaded costs that will pay back dividends over the long haul," he said.

GBD's reputation for sustainable projects was a secondary consideration for the publisher.

"They just know how to do six-story office buildings," he said. "They could do one in their sleep. We were very impressed with their grasp of the qualities a building like this needs."

Construction is on schedule to be completed in September, with a move-in date in October. After that, only the slow passage of decades will tell whether the building meets Campbell's test of time.

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