FIRMS breaking new ground

Himmelman Construction Engages Students To Help With Project Engineering Problem

Colorado-based Himmelman Construction is taking authentic learning to the next level, by engaging engineering students at the STEM School and Academy in Douglas County to find a solution for two structural columns that affect the visual aesthetics and functionality of the space.

“We enjoy involving our end-users in the construction process,” said Barry Himmelman, president of the company. “Giving these bright young engineering students a chance to participate in a real-life problem was an opportunity we could not pass up,” he added.

While completing a 30,000-sq-ft renovation of an existing building, the construction team lowered the floor 24 in. to accommodate a second floor. In the process, they discovered structural columns that affect the building layout. Himmelman, eager to involve the school, asked the team to throw the problem to the students. “Let’s see what they come up with,” he said.

The first column is on a ramp that must be ADA compliant. It extends into the pathway of the ramp, creating an unsightly obstacle. The second column is in middle of the fitness center on the ground floor. The ceiling in this room will be open, so whatever solution is found for this column, it must flow visually on the ground floor.

“This is a mission-driven concept,” Page adds. “We hope to change office culture.” Management retains the right to move tenants around within the building as space allocations and needs change. There is no “ownership” of a particular space or even of an individual desk on a regular basis. “It’s a collaborative approach, one where the traditional sense of space is more blurred,” Page says.

The five-story, 41,356-sq-ft building includes nearly 40 collaborative, flexible office spaces in various sizes and shapes, and 16 glass-walled conference rooms with occupancy sensors and integrated-lighting, audio-visual and HVAC controls. Each of the first-floor offices has expansive spaces filled with natural light and 10-hr, open-beam ceilings. The main floor offers digital signage and event space that holds up to 160 people for cocktails or banquet seating and can be leased by the public for special events.

The Alliance Center currently houses 20-25 tenants, most of them smaller nonprofits such as Conservation Colorado, Colorado Solar Energy Industries Association, Sierra Club, Bike Denver and eGo Car Share. The building’s newest tenant is the Nonprofit Centers Network, which is relocating its main office from San Francisco to Denver.

The $3.7-million renovation, designed by Denver’s Gensler and being built by contractor EJCÚ, with owner’s oversight from Fitzmartin Consulting, will also be a high-tech, green showcase. It features three roof-mounted, wind-driven turbines “on steroids” that integrate with solar panels to provide the building’s power, says Don Fitzmartin, owner of Fitzmartin Consulting. He says that, to his knowledge, this will be the first use of urban wind turbines in Denver. “The technology here is so sophisticated that it allows the tenants not to worry about technology,” he says.

The five-story building includes nearly 40 collaborative, flexible office spaces in various sizes and shapes, plus ample common spaces and tenant service areas.

By Mark Shaw, ENR Mountain States

A complete interior renovation of the historic Alliance Center building at 15th & Wynkoop streets in Denver’s Lower Downtown aims to create a LEED-Platinum-registered office environment that has not been tried anywhere else in the city.

The open-space interior plan “intuitively co-locates” different groups of tenants who will share office resources such as computer networks, conference rooms, printers and technical services and even cubicle and desk space on a rotating basis, says Jason Page, the Alliance Center director. His group, the Alliance for Sustainable Colorado, will manage the tenants when renovations are complete later this spring.

Page says the open-concept plan should save both money and energy. It will also provide tenants with better networking opportunities and maximum flexibility in how they use the physical resources of the building. It works only in a nearly paperless environment, he says.

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