

The Future is Now

With the construction of a new service center and renovation of existing facilities, Commonwealth Architects and Perkins + Will create a fresh new corporate campus in Richmond.

Like all building projects, the expansion of the Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield complex in Richmond began with a need – a need to renovate the existing headquarters and to provide new space to consolidate scattered personnel and accommodate growth of the data center. And, like many building projects, the emphasis changed as discussions with the client progressed. “The data center became the driver of everything,” says Lee Shadbolt, AIA, who served as project manager.

Planning for the Southeast regional headquarters began in June 2000 with the selection of an architectural team composed of Commonwealth Architects, of Richmond, in collaboration with Ai, of Washington, D.C. (The Ai practice has since become part of Chicago-based Perkins + Will.) In pursuing the commission against tough competition, the Commonwealth/Ai team was a natural. Not only were the two firms familiar with

each other, but Ai possessed experience with large-scale data centers, such as America Online, and Commonwealth’s senior staff had a track record with office buildings, while offering a local presence to oversee the daily progress on the building.

Early in the process, a key accomplishment was the acquisition of nearly 12 acres of adjacent property, which allowed the company to remain on the site and more than double the size of its facility at the same time. With a total of almost 27 acres of land at its disposal, the design team found it advantageous to extend the campus southward toward Broad Street and position the new building to create a landscaped forecourt at the new front entrance and a more private, grassy courtyard behind the existing building. Reinforcing the site’s linear organization is a circulation path that funnels employees from the parking lots into the buildings along a new “Main Street.”



New building (at right in photo, facing page) frames an entrance forecourt. Glass skin (right) reveals the simplicity of structural frame.



The two buildings are nested (left) to provide adjacencies with the parking deck and data center.

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Photos: Prakash Patel

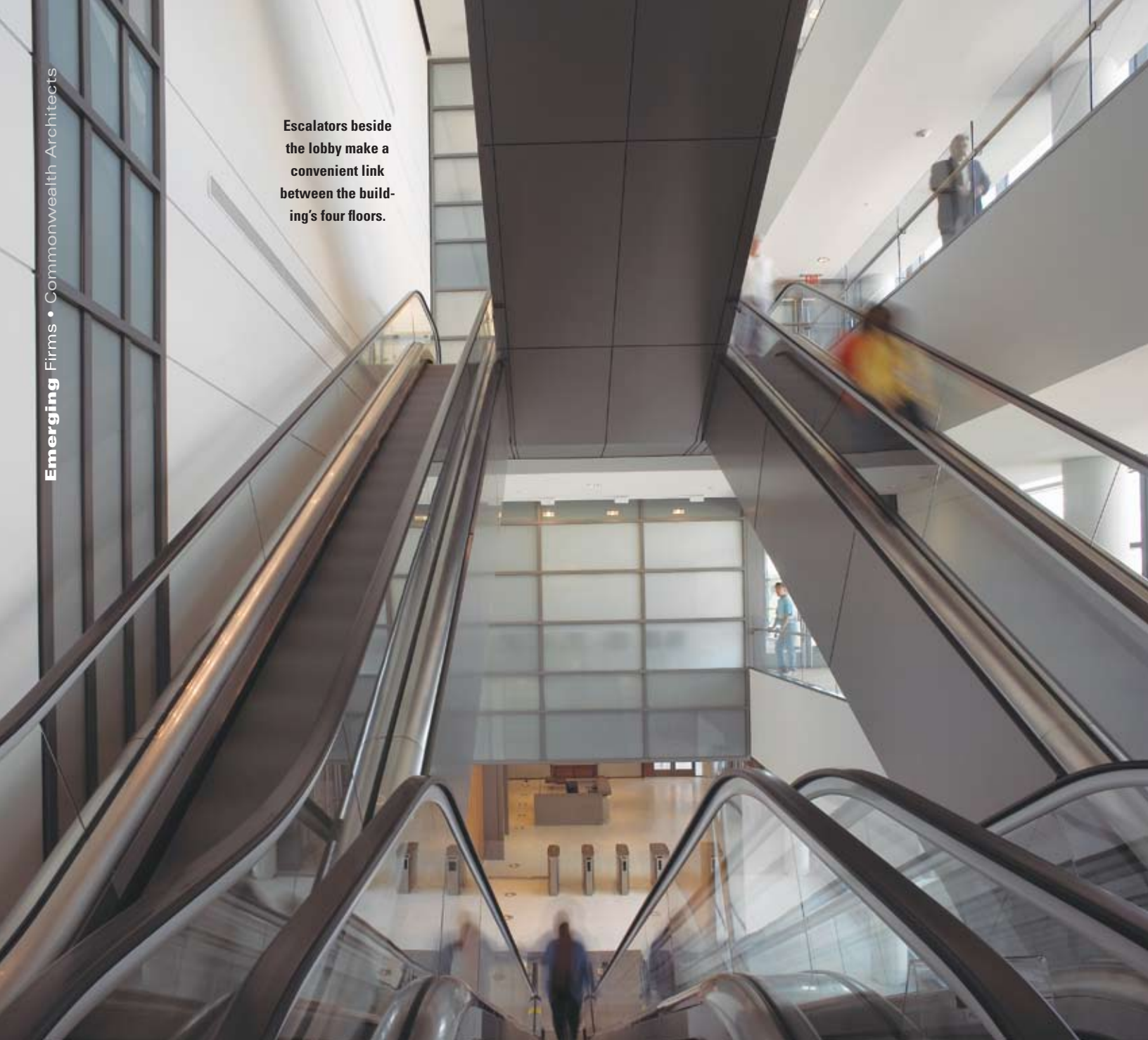
A three-level parking deck for 820 cars (right) connects to the first floor with a bridge; its low profile keeps from blocking views.

This system of pedestrian movement continues inside the building with corridors along the west façade of the new building. For vertical circulation along the pedestrian spine, escalators were selected over elevators – in part because they move people faster over short distances, but also to promote more interaction between employees and building users, Shadbolt says.

From the start, Anthem representatives demanded “very large floor plates” for the complex. The design solution was to connect the two buildings in a way that makes them function as one, yielding usable floor areas of more than 100,000 square feet on each linked floor. Raised access flooring and under-floor air distribution provides Anthem employees with the latest generation in indoor air quality, energy conservation, and sustainability. The system allows employees to control temperature and air flow in their individual cubicles.



Escalators beside the lobby make a convenient link between the building's four floors.



Raised access flooring also offers the advantage of locating the electrical, phone, and data cabling beneath the floor, rather than overhead. This was appealing to Anthem's management, because the company frequently reconfigures work teams – which means moving people, workstations, offices, and cabling. The cost for such “churn” is greatly reduced over the long haul by the raised flooring system, although the initial construction costs are greater.

Ultimately the main driving force in the project was the need for a high-powered data center that could grow with the company and deliver the highest degree of reliability. This created the demand for a 58,000-square-foot facility tucked securely in the base of the building. Among other attributes, the plant contains an uninterrupted power supply, switch gears, generators, and chillers that deliver layout flexibility and

potential for expansion – all without risking downtime in the computer system or a loss of data.

On the outside, the building skin is modern and timeless, complementing the existing building exterior, but not copying it. The east façade exposes a plinth that contains the data center; the west elevation is composed of primarily glass and aluminum panels, which serve to reinforce the circulation spine and accessibility of the public spaces.

Dedicated in November 2003, the facility already is undergoing a major behind-the-scenes transformation as its computing capabilities are expanded for use as the central data center for WellPoint, Inc., the insurer's new parent company. So, although they commissioned a building with the future in mind, Anthem's executives have discovered that the future is now.

– Vernon Mays

Project: Anthem Southeast Headquarters

Architect of Record: Commonwealth Architects, Richmond (Robert S. Mills, AIA, principal-in-charge; Lee A. Shadbolt, AIA, project manager; Dominic Venuto, CID, IIDA, principal for programming/interiors; Ken Van Riper, AIA, Alastair Reilly, AIA, Cathy Saunders, CID, James Veal, Christiana Lafanzani, James Smither, Elizabeth VanBuren, project team)

Associated Architect: Ai/Perkins+Will, Washington, D.C. (Alison Williams, FAIA, design principal; Rusty Meadows, managing principal; David Haresign, AIA, principal-in-charge; J.P. Spickler, AIA, Marc Schneiderman, IIDA, Kelan Dyer, AIA, Carolyn Ubben, AIA, Arthur Meister, Shelly Boyle, IIDA, Cesar Campana, project team)

Consultants: Jones Lang LaSalle Americas, Inc. (project management); KPMG Consulting Tax Advantaged Design (taxes); Ai/Integral Performance Engineering (MEP engineering); Rathgeber/Goss Associates (structural for HQ2); Fox Associates Consulting Engineers (structural for deck, HQ1); Draper Aden Associates (civil); Glazing Consultants, Inc. (glazing); Froehling & Robertson, Inc. (geotechnical); Schnabel Engineering Assoc. (testing); Engineering Consulting Services (testing); Wilbur Smith & Associates (traffic); Professional Service Industries (environmental); Lerch Bates & Associates (vertical transportation); Acoustical Design Collaborative (acoustical & A/V); Tricon Foodservice Consultants, Inc. (food service); Illume Creatif (lighting); Lucas & Associates (roofing); The Whitlock Group (security A/V); James C. Bethel (specifications); Ferguson Engineering (life safety); National Institute for Fitness and Sports (fitness); Facility Support Inc. (computer networking)

General Contractor (Office): The Whiting-Turner Contracting Company

Owner: Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield

RESOURCES

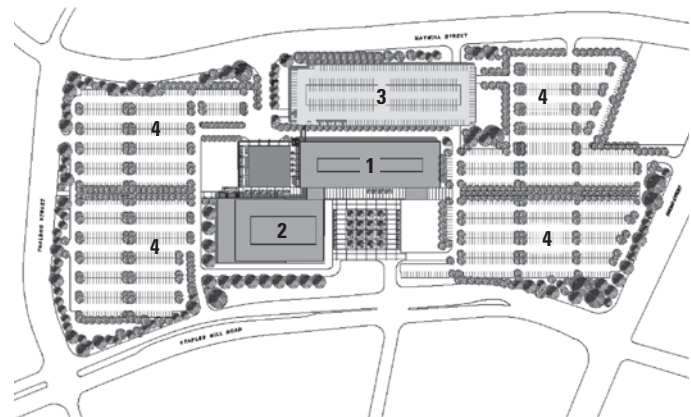
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Offices receive plenty of daylight (right). Cafeteria features a curved, perforated metal ceiling (below).



Photos: Prakash Patel



- 1 New Building
- 2 Renovated Building
- 3 Parking Deck
- 4 Surface Parking

Site Plan

