



Open to change

Eppstein Uhen stays flexible for GE

By Paul Snyder

One key theme drove the design of the GE Healthcare Research Park in Milwaukee: flexibility.

Granted, the four-story, 506,000-square-foot building, which provides space for more than 2,000 employees, might bring to mind terms like solid or sturdy. But project architect Eppstein Uhen Architects was working for clients that didn't want anything set in stone.

In addition to designing a building for an ever-changing company like GE, Eppstein Uhen also worked under Irgens Development Partners, which owns the facility.

"Leasing buildings seems to be a growing trend in the industry," said John Chapman, Eppstein Uhen's corporate studio director and principal. "It presents a bit of a challenge because suddenly, you're working for two masters.

"We don't know if [Irgens] might some day sell the building or have it subdivided into four units, but we had to take that into account."

To that end, the design team organized the space around a focal point of a curved curtain wall in the center of the building that provides large, open floor plates that can accommodate easy movement of department lines and territories.

That flexible style can serve GE well. Chapman said that even during the design phase of the structure, GE acquired new companies and employees, signaling a strong need for a facility that could regularly accommodate change and growth.

"At the same time that we were accounting for that kind of growth, though, we also had to remember we were fostering a community within this changing environment," he said.

To promote strong worker interaction,



Photos courtesy of Eppstein Uhen Architects Inc.

PROJECT ESSENTIALS

Project Name: GE Healthcare Research Park

Location: Milwaukee

Submitting Company: Eppstein Uhen Architects Inc., Milwaukee

General Contractor: CG Schmidt Inc., Milwaukee

Project Leader: John Chapman, Eppstein Uhen's corporate studio director and principal

Architect: Eppstein Uhen Architects Inc.

Engineers: Dolan & Dustin Inc., Wauwatosa, electrical engineer; Pierce Engineers Inc.,

Eppstein Uhen designed core areas - open stairs, cafes, restrooms and conference rooms - with strong connections to natural light and the outdoors. Designers also made instantly accessible some of the necessary stops on the way to or from work.

"There's a branch bank, medical clinic, dry cleaners and really all the amenities that could benefit an employee right there in the building," Chapman said.

The other task Eppstein Uhen faced was creating a look for the building that adequately conveyed GE's high-tech, memorable brand.

In addition to the building's distinctive curtain wall, designers also made a statement with the two-story main lobby, which is banked on one side and features large walnut panels with random patterns of lights that can be programmed to change color. The team placed a 15-foot abstract globe outside to reinforce the company's global business strategy.

"It really is one of the most recognizable buildings, not only in Research Park, but of all the buildings we've done," Chapman said. "It's a unique project, and we're fortunate to have been a part of the effort to put it together."

Milwaukee, structural engineer; Ring & DuChateau Inc., Milwaukee, mechanical, plumbing engineer

Owner: Irgens Development Partners LLC, Milwaukee

Project Cost: \$89 million

Project Size: 506,000 square feet

Start Date: Fall 2004

Completion Date: February 2006