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Lesco Inc. World Headquarters

By Lou Kren

Lesco Inc. needed more room. The turf-care product producer and distributor had outgrown its 50,000 square foot Rocky River headquarters and undertook a five-year search for a new home. The quest is over as Lesco leaves its old digs-five small buildings and some temporary trailers-and takes residence in its new world headquarters at 15885 Sprague Rd. in Strongsville. Formerly a Hewlett-Packard sales facility, the 90,000 square foot two-story building underwent a one-million-dollar-plus renovation to house its new tenant and 225 headquarter employees.

The headquarters is owned by Carnegie Management, Westlake, which then inked a long-term lease with Lesco. Carnegie purchased 28 acres, with 20 acres encompassing Lesco's headquarters, a 4,500 square foot outbuilding slated for warehouse space, parking area and frontage on Sprague Road. Eight acres in back are available from Carnegie for further development.

Overseeing the renovation for Lesco is James Vanco, director of service-center operations and real estate, while Sam Khouri handles the development for Carnegie Management. Other major players include GSI Architects, Cleveland, with Timothy Huffman as project architect, and General Contractor D-A-S Construction Co., Cleveland, with Joe Knab serving as project Manager.

As completed, Lesco's headquarters encompasses an open floorplan. The main entrance is a two-story glass-front lobby with a refurbished staircase and ceiling, all of modern design. New sconces add to the lobby décor. Glass-walled executive offices and conference rooms comprise the first-floor along with utility space and an employee cafeteria with a full-service kitchen, large lunchroom and patio off the back. A 12-foot suspended ceiling and large hallways provide an airy interior. A shipping/receiving area exists in the back west corner. The open second floor features cubicles ringed by a few offices and meeting rooms. Communications centers are sprinkled throughout, identified through the use of distinct colors and wall designs. In general, the interior is a mix of earth-tone colors. Visitors will be struck by the lack of heavy interior walls and doors and greeted with an open atmosphere. Where doors were necessary, existing units were stained and reused. One elevator is located off the lobby while two staircases, located on the east and west ends of the building, supplement the lobby staircase.

From Sales Office to Headquarters

The building, of structural steel and masonry construction, is of slab-on-grade design on the first floor and slab-on-joists-and-decking on the second. Nearly the entire interior was slated for renovation, including 90% of the first floor's 43,573 square feet and nearly all of the second floor's 47,103 square feet. The building required huge renovation efforts that had to be accomplished quickly. Carnegie Management closed the sale in mid-October



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Facade of Lesco, Inc.



Office Space



Outside of Offices

2000-Lesco wrapped up sale negotiations with Hewlett-Packard the previous February—and construction started before the end of the month. To add to the challenge, Lesco wanted to occupy the space by February 2001. Such a timetable tested the skills of project architect GSI, which drew up construction plans and placed them out for pricing in September for General Contractor, D-A-S Construction Co.

"This building was constructed in 1985 as a single-user facility, housing Hewlett-Packard sales personnel," says Lesco's Vanco. "Our main thrust was to convert it from a sales office to a corporate headquarters. The first floor consisted of large meeting rooms and computer-equipment areas, and that floor had no windows at all."

That Would Change

"The front of the building, constructed of solid brick and cement block, was demolished in November and December to facilitate construction of the window openings," explains D-A-S' Joe Knab, project manager. "The finished product consists of enormous tinted glass windows, reaching from just above the fin tube to the underside of the second floor."

This was no small feat, as December was one of the coldest on record. Adding to the challenge was the fast-track schedule, meaning that huge window openings created through demolition had to be boxed in while inside work continued.

"We couldn't allow the cold weather to slow down the exterior renovations," continues Knab. "We proceeded with the demolition, reframing, drywall-hanging and finishing on the inside and waged a constant battle trying to keep the space inside warm enough to continue working."

Fortunately, the masonry walls, demolished for window openings, were non load-bearing, saving the costs associated with expensive shoring and new structural steel. To incorporate windows, the front exterior grade was lowered by three feet and replaced with brick up to the window line.

The first floor carried the brunt of heavy rework, while the second floor presented challenges related to demolition, soffiting, and wall-framing.

In addition, the majority of the interior required power and communication rewiring throughout as well as new paint and carpeting.

Rewiring was a particularly challenging affair. The building's original design implemented under-floor wire troughs that eased in the renovation, however more work was needed.

"The newly renovated second floor consists mainly of cubicles, which means all the power and communications wiring had to come up through the floor," explains Knab. "The floor wiring troughs were helpful, but we still needed several hundred stub-up locations (to bring wiring to the cubicle-wall receptacles) that had to be carried from the troughs. In addition, we had to remove all the old wiring and pull through the new. The plan, which we followed, was to complete the second floor and turn it over to the

carpeting installer while finishing the first floor. The first floor required more

demolition and new construction while the second floor required more stub-ups for wiring," commented Gary Bryant, superintendent for D-A-S Construction Co.

Unique interior design characteristics also kept the General Contractor and subcontractors on their toes.

"Tim Huffman and GSI did an excellent job designing uniquely curved soffits and walls" said Knab. "These types of features require extreme attention to details which D-A-S is accustomed to administering."

The use of 1/2-in. tempered glass floor-to-ceiling walls on the first and second floors for executive offices and meeting rooms added to the project's complexity. This type of installation is trickier than basic stud and drywall work. The addition of a state-of-the-art computer room was another challenge undertaken successfully. Priority was given to finishing the computer room so Lesco could install and startup computer equipment prior to building occupation.

One challenge inherent in any renovation of an existing building is dealing with hidden conditions and design/construction changes brought by those conditions. Tight cooperation between GSI's Huffman, Lesco's Vanco and D-A-S Construction Co.'s Joe Knab and Gary Bryant eased that process.

"The four of us had to identify the change, price it, get approval and implement it while adhering to the construction timetable," explains Knab. "We worked very well together, and Carnegie Management worked closely with us to ensure that financing and change orders flowed smoothly."

GSI began design work for the renovation in June 2000 and Huffman discusses how the design reflected Lesco's needs.

"Lesco wanted to put offices on the first floor but the building didn't have windows," he explains. "That was a major concern. We found that the brick was not load-bearing, which allowed removal of much of the first-floor front exterior. But we wanted to keep as much brick as possible, so we designed to allow for brick between the windows and below, and then in-filled to the ceiling with glass and spandrel panels."

The access of natural light to the building's interior was another concern.

"We wanted to allow for as much natural light in the building as possible," says Huffman, "especially on the second floor where many workstations were to be located. So we pulled offices away from the wall and allowed natural light to travel inside, giving a more transparent feel. We did the same on the first floor, where glass office walls let the light travel inward."

The second floor, a wide-open intimidating space, had to be broken down. The addition of soffits as well as some sloped green- or purple-colored walls in common areas accomplished that task, giving the second floor a more intimate feel.

The lobby, as the main entry and focal point, received special attention, according to Huffman.

"We wanted to update the lobby," he says. "We removed the linear metal-strip ceiling and designed an appealing and acoustics-friendly tile ceiling. Also, we painted the soffits, added accents to the wallcoverings and replaced the quarry floor tile with ceramic tile. In addition, the reception desk, of massive oak construction, was replaced with a lighter, more delicate-looking desk. A large curved soffit was also added, giving the lobby more character."

The design incorporates Lesco's requirement that departments be grouped together by work function, and workstations were strategically placed to provide simplified access from the existing wiring troughs.

Great Location, Great Team

Lesco's Vanco is understandably pleased with the renovated building and its location, offering access through I-71 as well as the Ohio Turnpike and its 480 bypass. He credits all involved with making Lesco's wish a reality, noting that all contractors worked throughout the cold winter and the holiday season to finish the project on time. He singled out Carnegie Management and Sam Khouri for special praise.

"Lesco entered into a purchase agreement with Hewlett-Packard, but our intent was not to own the building but to tie it up with a long-term lease," he explained. "We contacted 74 developers, owners, REITs, etc. across the United States including about 15 in Cleveland. We narrowed it down to three players and Carnegie Management was the winner. Carnegie offered local management, expertise in the marketplace and financing ability."

Khouri himself looks forward to having Lesco as a client.

"We have a good relationship with Lesco," he says. "And we expect this to be a good relationship for the long term."

Besides the Lesco headquarters, Carnegie Management is busy developing several other local projects. The Ohio Health Choice Center is a 45,000-square-foot, three-story, Class-A office building in Westlake anchored by Ohio Health Choice, a health-insurance provider. Ohio Health Choice intends to occupy the entire third floor of the building, on approximately three acres of land adjacent to I-90. Another Carnegie Management development is Cobblestone Square Shopping Center, a 600,000-square-foot retail space in Sheffield Village. The 66-acre site abuts I-90 at the Route 254-Sheffield exit, about a mile east of Midway Mall.

GSI Architects, fresh off its work with Lesco, provided architectural services for the new Plain Dealer offices on East 18th Street and Superior Avenue in Cleveland. The 245,000-square-foot building, on five acres, utilizes 600 feet of frontage on Superior. Most striking is the three-story glazed atrium lobby. Look for a feature on this project in an upcoming issue of Properties.

D-A-S Construction Co. has been busy supplying General Contracting and Construction Management services to several area projects. The company recently completed construction of a new Bob Evans restaurant in Middleburg Heights at Bagley Road and I-71. The project required the demolition of the existing Bob Evans and ground-up construction of the new restaurant. Another recently completed project includes the construction of the Marconi

Customer Visit Center in Highland Heights, a 202,000-square-foot building which includes a 17,000 square foot kitchen/cafeteria, 70,000 square feet of office space and a 115,000 square foot distribution center. D-A-S is currently facilitating the renovation of Stuart House Apartments, located on Bunts Road on the Cleveland-Lakewood border that encompasses renovations to five, five-story apartment buildings. Another project under construction is the old Fries & Schuele Department store on West 25th Street just across from the West Side Market. D-A-S is renovating the existing five-story, 73,000 square foot building, and will begin ground-up construction of a new five-story, 72,000 square foot complex including a parking garage to enhance the existing Fries & Schuele building in July. Additionally, as a CECO Metal Building supplier, D-A-S is leading the design and erection of a 16,000 square foot building, inclusive of a fifty ton crane for Keifer Tool & Mold on West 150th in Cleveland. Recently D-A-S completed the ground up construction of a Bank One branch at Great Lakes Mall located in Mentor and another in North Gahanna, located just north of Columbus.

Vanco also recognized the City of Strongsville for its part in bringing Lesco into the community.

"Eugene Magocky, Strongsville's director of economic development, along with Mayor Walter F. Ehrnfelt provided 10-year tax abatement for new construction and worked to make our move as smooth as possible."

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