



Developing Design

New Twinsburg HQ showcases Gateway Hospitality Group's creative concepts

By John Elliott | Photos by Steve Zorc

Twinsburg developer Bob Voelker first made a name for himself when he built the Hilton Garden Inn and Conference Center in Twinsburg in 1999. The chef-turned-developer/hotel operator brought so many creative concepts to the hotel that he became the first Hilton Garden Inn franchisee granted the right to use his own design ideas in Hilton Garden franchises.

A lot has happened since then, not just for Voelker's company, Gateway Hospitality Group (GHG), but for the 65-acre parcel along Route 82 near I-480 in Twinsburg, which now boasts five restaurants (Cracker Barrel, Wendy's, Damon's, Donato's and Blue Canyon Kitchen and Tavern), three office buildings (Windstream, Kaiser Permanente and Shelly Co.) and numerous interconnecting roads. The park is nestled in a nature preserve, offering a quiet, park-like setting.

Voelker has been as much a visionary for his native Twinsburg as he is for the

hospitality industry. His integrated office park has transformed Twinsburg from a tradition-bound bedroom community to a development hub.

Canyon Falls Corporate Center is located near the northwest corner of State Route 82 and Interstate 480 in Twinsburg. The center paved the way with Canyon Falls Boulevard leading to its first building, at 42,000 square feet, which was completed in the fall of 1999 and occupied in the summer of 2000. The second building, at 32,000 square feet, was completed in the spring of 2001 and fully occupied by the end

of 2003. The third building, located on Canyon Falls Boulevard, is 23,000 square feet and was completed in 2008. In that building, GHG's headquarters totals 6,800 square feet.

While the single-story, steel-frame brick building is not the largest edifice on Canyon Falls Boulevard, it is the first designed to house Voelker's growing development company, which now has operations in four states. The corporate headquarters is an exciting place to visit, as it showcases his team's progressive ideas, making it a destination for hotel developers nationwide.



MODERN MEETING SPACE The primary conference room is outfitted with a custom designed table and Herman Miller chairs, which complement the frosted glass panels, zebra wood shelving and earth-tone carpeting that give the space a clean, contemporary look.

GHG will occupy about one third of the space in the \$3.5 million building.

Voelker, an early supporter of the Hilton Garden Inn product, conceptualized the use of expanding the focused-service property with large meeting and banquet space. Meeting and banquet space allows for large functions serviced by in-house chefs, and Voelker views the food and beverage as the cornerstone of his success.

Some of these concepts are evident in the new headquarters building, which shares a parking lot with one of the other Canyon Falls Corporate Center office buildings. But Voelker, always thinking to the future, believes that his own company's headquarters needed to be conducive to teamwork and creativity. A visit to this building needed to be a memorable experience for visitors and create as much for the team who work there.

The building is designed to be an environment and experience of creativity, where all hospitality discipline work is done.

"We're in the hospitality business," Voelker says. "We greet our visitors as we would our guests with the spirit of hospitality. We design our interiors for our hotels, and we reflect what we do for our clients.

"It's like going to a store and getting a glass of wine and cheese," he says. "We want to represent what we do. Our corporate team greets visitors with the same VIP level of service we offer to our guests in our hotels."

Voelker wanted a headquarters that would also carry the innovative spirit which characterizes his work. His most recent project was the Blue Canyon Kitchen and Tavern in the adjacent "Wilcox Place," the most upscale of the four restaurants there, in 2004. Unable to attract an upscale restaurant due to market demographics, Voelker took a non-producing piece of property and turned it into an income-producing property. He built a unique structure.

The rustic, lodge-style Blue Canyon Kitchen and Tavern restaurant has two 40-foot log handcrafted trusses, cathedral ceilings, handcrafted log rafters, purlin systems and structural insulated panels. The myriad of systems allowed Voelker to create a series of rooms, each with a unique atmosphere.

Design team taps partners

The design team for the new headquarters included Voelker, Tari Dewille, director of interior design, Margaret Hill, director of procurement, and Kevin Oliver, a project architect at

Cleveland-based Kaczmar Architects Inc., a longtime Voelker partner.

"It's a standard interior build up, but the design was [intended] to make it a very unique space," says Dave Gutfranski, senior project manager for Snively Building Co., the Chagrin Falls-based builder that installed the shell for the new facility. "It's a real nice space that isn't just plain white walls; it's actually got some character, with a state-of-the-art lobby, which includes a wine bar and barista station to a complete design studio and gallery to ceiling glass tile bathrooms. The entire corporate space is unique with plenty of progressive flair."

From the moment you enter the GHG corporate office, the lobby immediately sets the visitor at ease with dark colors, contemporary chandelier, recycled laminate wood composite floor, wall wine rack, built-in marine aquarium and curved, granite reception desk beneath a large, oval-shaped ceiling canopy with imbedded Swarovski crystal rings. The hanging oval in the ceiling is one of several elements that GHG custom designed for the project. The hanging oval is made of metal, studs, drywall and unistrut, a three-sided fixture with holes that can be threaded and hung from a ceiling.



SPECIAL SPACES The new Gateway Hospitality Group headquarters is designed with unique details, such as a sit-down bar and a built-in aquarium in the lobby.

Much of the lobby is naturally illuminated by wall-length windows, allowing full views of the parking area and park-like outdoors. A subdued green wall and soft-cushioned, blue chairs enhance the sense of comfort. Track lights hang from a suspended, curved ceiling panel.

A sit-down bar with blue bar stools runs right beneath the marine aquarium and hanging pendant lamps.

The loft-like ceiling is outlined at one corner angle by a duct pipe.

Fluid interior design

The design was inspired to enable the staff to work and move things around, while still offering comfort.

“Once the environment was functioning properly, the question was, ‘what can we do to improve the aesthetic?’” says Ken Wieder, principal at North Randall-based Basic Cases, which constructed many of the wood design elements. “Bob (Voelker) wanted it to be aesthetically pleasing as well as utilitarian. He wanted a place that was comfortable.”

“We felt we needed to move your eyes slightly to this tall wall that’s behind [the reception desk],” says Wieder. The multiple level elevations in the reception desk created a fluid, soft break.

“When Bob brings you in, he’s very detail oriented,” says Dewille, a long-time Voelker associate.

Being a developer, GHG managed much of the project. Bruce Childs, who has since moved to Davis Development in Solon, acted as project manager for GHG. Childs notes that GHG managed about half of the subcontractors in the project.

GHG was able to purchase many of the custom built materials, such as the light fixtures.

“The design construction was just outstanding,” Childs says.

Kitchen takes center stage

What’s not visible immediately is a combination kitchen/office area right behind the reception desk, where staffers and visitors can prepare food, attend to work, and socialize. This area houses

office equipment, from copy machines to postage scales.

“In a house, you always congregate in the kitchen,” Voelker says. “We designed this to be where the activity is.”

“Everybody has their lunch in the lobby,” adds Dewille. “We don’t eat in offices any more.”

The lobby, in other words, lends itself to multiple functions, a concept that Voelker has adapted from his hotels.

Unlike many corporate headquarters, the kitchen is incorporated into the lobby.

“We want the team that works for us to be up front,” Voelker says. “It’s all right there. That’s the experience a guest wants today.”

The lower level of the kitchenette is painted with a blue glossy finish that matches the bar stools near the fish tank.

Connected space

What’s most apparent once you’re inside the building is the sense of openness. Most of the rooms are not



BUILDING INFLUENCE The new, 23,000-square-foot facility showcases Gateway Hospitality Group's progressive ideas, making it a destination for hotel developers nationwide.

completely separated from adjacent spaces; most of the walls don't reach the ceiling, allowing each work area to have a sense of connectedness under the loft-like ceiling.

"The best way for people to learn is from other people while they're communicating," Voelker says. "It's that total experience that makes the environment more comfortable for people. That open work environment to me is very conducive to learning. Hotels today are being built with the loft feel. It doesn't give you a confining space."

"It makes a statement for who we are, from the design studio to the fish tank in the lobby," Voelker says. "They can see how we use technology and for all of our resources to get the job done in a creative and progressive environment for our team members. It reflects our design style today."

In hotels today, the lobby is more for social interaction, not just for checking guests in and out. "The experience today is in the lobby," Voelker says. "Hotels are

being designed with less dollars in the guest room." He uses the term "lifestyle hotels" to describe what's popular today. "People can eat, work, relax and watch fish [in the aquarium]."

"We wanted people to walk in the door and say, 'Wow, these people are in the hospitality industry,'" says Dewille, who, as an interior designer by training, had input on the millwork, lighting, colors and furniture.

Most of the design elements communicate a sense of quality, such as the tiger wood effect in the floor and the glass surfaces of the bathroom sinks. "It becomes a showcase for us to our partners," Voelker says. "We wanted our office to accommodate that aspect of our business."

Two conference rooms, outfitted with blue Herman Miller chairs and black custom designed tables from Basic Cases, are adjacent to the lobby and are partially sealed off by frosted glass panels. In the main conference room, a digital flat screen is mounted on one wall, and a zebra wood shelf runs along

the length of another wall. The secondary conference room can be viewed through the lobby aquarium encased in one of the black cabinet walls.

A brown, square-patterned carpet covers most of the rooms beyond the lobby. Walls in some of the work areas feature grass cloth, supporting the natural theme.

A ledge along one hallway will display gifts and artwork, in keeping with the art galleries that GHG's hotels have.

Function influences design

Dewille worked with Ken Wieder, principal at Basic Cases, on the design. She says the function of the furniture influenced its design.

"If I design it, I make sure I know how it is installed," she says. "You've got to know where the HVAC is going. You have to know every aspect of it. What's beneath the floor, what's behind the walls."

Wieder, who worked with GHG on Blue Canyon and some of its hotels, brought plenty of expertise in pre-fab-

ricated structures and creative finishes.

"The GHG team was way too crowded in the space they were in," Wieder says, noting that the new building triples the work area.

He says because of his relationship with GHG, he was able to understand what the developer wanted without having to see prints. He understood the classic contemporary style they wanted.

Wieder developed the horizontal zebra wood in the registration area. Zebra wood is usually striated to create vertical stripes. By experimenting, he came up with a horizontal effect that supports the fluidity of the interior space. "We play with shape, wood, color, dimension until we get the feeling that people are looking for," Wieder says. "This work is fun."

"[Voelker] wanted an open warehouse effect," Wieder says. "He wanted more of an open industrial feel. He wanted people to see the labels on the bottles. It works. It's different. It's sort of like a wine sculpture."

Wieder noted that the bathroom vanities look like a horizontal slice of a tree trunk.

"It took me a long time to figure that out," he says. "It is wild and gorgeous at the same time. It's fantastic."

The bathroom sink is made of glass bowl vessels.

"[Dewille] asked me if I could recess the bowl to fit into a log," Wieder says. "She just gave me challenge after challenge after challenge. There's a familiarity with what we've done, but it's special since it's never been done quite like this."

Natural elements

Dewille characterizes the design as "urban chic," but also incorporating natural elements.

"I wanted to do some things that were combining modern technology, natural wood beams and natural stone," she says.

A 1,500-square-foot design study in the center of the building will have a seven- by 14-foot table with a stainless steel surface for holding design boards beneath track spotlights, both fluorescent and incandescent.



WATER WALL From within a secondary conference room, the lobby can be viewed through an aquarium that is built into a wall of cabinets.

"That's a big part of the office, the design center," Voelker notes.

The central hallway has wood paneled walls featuring photos of the company's works in process. Suspended from the hallway ceiling runs a long, bendable metal wire holding clip-on lamps.

Voelker's office faces the south and sports a pine tree view of the Route 82 entrance to Canyon Falls Corporate Center.

Oliver, the project manager for the architect, says working with GHG on the project was similar to working on one of the company's hotels. He focused on the design of the built in sections and allowed GGH to determine colors, finishes, wall coverings, decorative lighting and millwork.

"They knew what they were going to do," Oliver says.

Open work area

Oliver says the open work area sought was similar to a studio atmosphere, and not unlike the one at his own company. He says it was important for the client to understand that the open work area

changes the way people work; there is less privacy.

The work areas were tailored to the functions, such as conferencing and designing.

"Each office was spaced out according to the way they work," he says.

Oliver says it was fun to see the final result of his design concepts. "We could walk in and recognize what we had designed, but we saw the colors and finishes they selected," he says.

"He has a very nicely integrated development area with very compatible architectural styles, with visible signage at the entry," says Larry Finch, Twinsburg's director of community planning and economic development. "He's given it high level curb appeal. He's been first rate. We're happy that he's here."

Canyon Falls Corporate Center will continue to grow. The next phase will be a two-story, 100,000-square-foot building for Class A office space. **P**

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