



Building Maryland's 'Gold Coast'

Heffner & Weber leading developer and builder of booming area around BWI Airport



PAM HUNTER — The Baltimore Construction News Special Feature

In the early 1960s, the area surrounding BWI—then-called the Friendship Airport—consisted of little more than empty fields. Sam Heffner, one of the founders of Heffner & Weber, a full-service real estate development and design/build construction company in Linthicum, Md., recalls that there were more cows than people at the end of the runways at the sleepy airport. Today, the BWI Central Business District, which Anne Arundel County Executive Janet Owens calls the “Gold Coast” of Maryland, is one of the fastest-growing areas in the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area. Heffner & Weber played a pioneering and crucial role in the region’s development and remains a key player in the area’s booming growth.

“This extremely dynamic development team is responsible for pioneering commercial real estate development in the BWI Airport Business District beginning in the mid ‘60s and were founding members of the now burgeoning BWI Business Partnership,” said Neil Shpritz, former executive director of the BWI Business Partnership, Inc., in a statement. “Their insight and vision has and continues to set new high standards for development in the area.”

The company was established as Dickinson-Heffner in 1965 by Sam Heffner and his original partner Ed Dickinson. The company developed much of the area that today surrounds the airport, including buildings for an electronics division of Westinghouse Corp., which was bought out by Northrop-Grumman in the 1990s; and the National Security Agency (NSA). The company, which in 1994 became known as Heffner & Weber, with Mitch Weber serving as president, and Heffner as chairman, continues to provide comprehensive real estate development, design-build, construction and property management services with an emphasis on office, industrial, and retail space.

Although the BWI Business District, along with the rest of the country, saw diminished new office development and construction during the real estate recession of the mid 1990’s, Heffner & Weber kept extremely busy during this period, recycling three of its original buildings. The National Security Agency’s FANX Complex, an 850,000 square foot secure campus housing some of the most sophisticated high-security space in the region, was literally gutted, re-designed and re-

built by Heffner & Weber at a cost of nearly \$50 million. The extremely high-priority and award-winning project broke all schedule records in spite of its extreme complexity, and reinforced the company’s well-known reputation for delivering technically and logistically challenging projects in record-setting time. It also won an Outstanding Engineering Achievement award for its innovative ice-storage cooling system. Heffner & Weber convinced NSA to use ice as the basis for the buildings’ new mechanical systems. At the time, ice storage for mechanical systems was a novel—though viable—concept, Weber says. The idea saved NSA approximately \$1 million in annual operating costs. “We’ve been responsible for getting some very innovative programs instituted by what might otherwise have been conservative decision-makers,” Weber adds.

During this temporary lull in new development, senior management was refining its “product-line” and raising the design bar in anticipation of the resurgence of the real estate market at the airport. By the end of the 1990s, Heffner & Weber was back on the development scene, using innovative and emerging technologies and materials to develop a new cutting-edge office building prototype.

“That has been part of what we do best—working closely with cutting-edge design consultants—both architectural and electrical/mechanical—to take projects that are challenging technically and logistically and come up with solutions that innovatively solve the clients’ requirements economically and in a time frame that is usually much faster than the traditional project delivery approach,” Weber says.

In April 2000, Heffner & Weber broke ground on a \$15 million, 85,000 square-foot speculative office building at 801 International Drive. Located in the company’s BWI Corporate Center North office park, the building featured bold architecture and new state-of-the-art technology such as a web-based building controls system that was the first of its kind in the nation. The system allows building tenants to monitor and control building systems, such as mechanical and electrical systems, on their laptops using web technology. “We actually pioneered [the system] with several product manufacturers and we’re proud of that,” Weber says.

The success of BWI Corporate Center North and an urgent space need resulting from BWI Airport’s \$1.8 billion expansion led Heffner & Weber to look towards

its BWI Corporate Center South property consisting of 120 acres of as-yet undeveloped land next to the Airport just south of and immediately adjacent to the BWI Amtrak and MARC Rail station. Heffner & Weber learned that the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) was being forced to move from its location at BWI to make room for the new 8,000-space daily parking garage. MDOT was in urgent need of a new headquarters building, and Heffner & Weber proposed a comprehensive, fast-track, design/build solution. It met all of MDOT’s critical needs and did so in the kind of record-setting timeframe that was needed to save the state huge penalties that would have been imposed by the contractor building the Airport’s parking garage if MDOT could not vacate the existing headquarters on schedule.

As it did with the Corporate Center North project, Heffner & Weber used cutting-edge technologies on the MDOT headquarters building but also made the building environmentally friendly at the direction of then Governor Parris Glendening (D). Using materials such as certified bamboo wall panels, cork and recycled carpet flooring; and incorporating state-of-the-art energy-efficient electrical and mechanical systems and a stormwater runoff management system that ensures that no additional storm-water runoff will run into the surrounding wetlands, the building is earmarked to earn a coveted “Gold” rating from the United States Green Building Council under its Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program. The project also recently earned the prestigious National Association of Industrial and Office Parks’ (NAIOP) 2004 Green Building of the Year Award as well as the Build-to-Suit Project of the Year.

Heffner & Weber prides itself on being a vertically integrated organization that takes a client from “cradle to grave,” Weber says. “We design it, we build it, we manage it, we own it, we clean it—nobody else is involved. It is a very satisfying business model because it allows us to really move rapidly, but it also allows varying disciplines under one umbrella.”

For example, Heffner & Weber not only designed and built the MDOT project, it also provided most of the peripheral items, such as the furniture, and the telephone and fiber optic systems. “All MDOT had to do

Please see page B8

Heffner & Weber

Continued from page B7

was move their belongings into a moving van and move into a finished building," Weber notes. Heffner & Weber is also designing and building all of the roads, utilities and infrastructure supporting the building and the Park, including a 1,400-foot

pedestrian bridge linking MDOT to the BWI Rail Station.

While office buildings in the BWI business district are Heffner & Weber's primary focus, the company also designs and builds for third party clients. When combined with its own portfolio, Heffner & Weber has designed, built and/or renovated nearly 15 million square feet of commercial space valued at nearly \$750 million for clients such as



Anne Arundel
Co. Economic
2 x 54

Hoyts Cinemas, Crown Theatres, Toyota, Bell Atlantic, Amerisuites, Hydro Aluminum, the Transportation Security Agency and many others.

Most recently, Heffner & Weber completed several high-end multiplex movie theater complexes for Landmark Theatres of California at award-winning Bethesda Row in Maryland and on E Street N.W. in Washington, D.C.'s burgeoning East End. "The projects were built very rapidly, and we've been able to use our significant owners' perspective to work with Landmark's management to get the jobs done on a extremely fast-

track basis, very economically, and with a high level of coordination between design and functionality," Weber says.

Since Heffner & Weber owns and operates the buildings it develops, it is able to offer its third party clients an "owners' perspective" that Weber believes is fairly unique. "We're not a typical general contractor. We come to the table knowing, for instance, how much it costs to operate a building, and we bring this kind of

expertise and experience to all of our projects even when we do not own them. We can literally serve as a client's in-house design and construction department and we aggressively market this service," Weber explains.

While Heffner & Weber has ventured into other areas, it's true heart lies where it all began—in the BWI Central Business District. Heffner & Weber hopes to build another 2.5 million square feet of Class-A office buildings at

BWI Corporate Center North and South and is currently evaluating introducing a mixed-use element into the project as the area matures. "We are going to be looking more closely at some mixed-use diversification on our properties at the airport," he says. "There have been many studies on the development of properties around airports, known collectively as an "Aerotropolis" done by groups such as the Urban Land Institute. BWI has been somewhat unique in that the surrounding area hasn't developed as rapidly as at other airports ... BWI was a much sleeper airport before Southwest Airlines came along. It has emerged as the dominant airport in the Baltimore-Washington region and one of the fastest growing airports in the nation." Heffner & Weber clearly plans to remain a key player in the region's burgeoning development.



C E V Building
Systems Ltd
3 x 90

Expressway Office
Solutions
BLUE
3 x 60