

Hospital building boom impacts A/E firms

> The surge is forcing firms to no longer opt for renovations, but instead think outside the box with newer buildings.

With an aging population and advancements in technology, construction and design in the health care industry has been on the uptick. Respondents to ZweigWhite's 2005 AEC Business Trends Survey believed the health-care market provided the strongest opportunities for design and construction firms heading into 2005. The surge seems to be continuing into 2006.

A boom in hospital construction that is changing the nature of hospital care is happening across the country, according to an article earlier this month in *USA Today*. Older, cramped hospitals are being replaced by newer hospitals that offer the most modern medical care with expanded amenities.

Stephen Q. Whitney, president/CEO of 250-person planning and design management firm **Albert Kahn Associates, Inc.** (Detroit, MI), says the hospital construction trend is "absolutely" true. Among its services, Albert Kahn Associates offers health care consulting, programming, and planning to clients. It's a national trend, Whitney says, but the strongest growth markets are the Southeast, Southwest, and California.

The boom means "huge opportunities, especially for those with a strong track record in health-care facility design," Whitney says, adding that he doesn't see it ending any time soon. "From all indications, this trend will be with us for the

next eight to 10 years. Many hospitals today were built under the Hill-Burton Act, which makes them date back to the 1950s and 1960s. These facilities have undergone additions and renovations to the point now where further modification is no longer cost-effective. Replacement is the right answer for the future of these hospitals."

Brenda Bush-Moline, senior vice president at 225-person architectural, interior design, and planning firm **VOA Associates Incorporated** (Chicago, IL), agrees that there's no immediate end to the growth. "If you're looking at master plans that go out to 2020 and 2025, I think it's here to stay." VOA offers services in several different markets including health care. Bush-Moline says that her firm has projects in the Midwest, Mid-Atlantic, and Southeast regions, and the construction surge is strong in all of those areas.

With the hospital projects, Bush-Moline says clients are analyzing the projects more thoroughly. They are linking the strategic plan and the facilities plan and the business plan together. They want to build the right size hospital. Flexibility needs to be built in so the building can accommodate any changes in the market.

Douglas C. Lindsay, president/CEO of 70-person **Array Healthcare Facilities Solutions** (King of Prussia, PA), a planning and design firm that is focused solely on the health care industry, says the surge in hospital construction is a nationwide trend. The firm can't hire enough people to do that kind of work, he says.

The construction trend is requiring A/E firms to become more specialized, Lindsay says. As the hospitals become more specialized, the firms must as well. They will need to understand each medical specialty so that they can incorporate that information into the project. Then the project will better suit the needs of the client.

Greg L. Delaney, vice president and principal of 30-person civil engineering and landscape architecture firm **Eberly & Associates, Inc.** (Atlanta, GA), says his firm is currently working on several medical campuses. With the medical market being so competitive, the role of A/E firms has increased. A/E firms can "use design to improve the attractiveness of the provider health system," he says.

The replacement hospital Trinity at Terrace Park in Bettendorf, Iowa, which was a project of Albert Kahn Associates, has features such as private suites and bathrooms that include overnight sleeping accommodations for family members, Internet access, and in-room massages for patients.

The competitive medical market forces not only hospital personnel to think outside the box, but A/E firms as well. These amenities help attract patients, doctors, and specialized services, Delaney says.

There's a nursing shortage and "providing such amenities will be the employer-of-choice," Whitney says.

"Hospitals that haven't done it are losing market share," Bush-Moline says.—

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