

For Immediate Release

For information

Melanie Lux, Lux + Associates
803.376.1603
mlux@luxandassociates.com



(Before)



(After)

RICHARDSON PLOWDEN TRANSFORMS OLD DIXIE ELECTRONICS WAREHOUSE INTO STATE-OF-THE-ART LEGAL OFFICE

COLUMBIA, S.C., October 11, 2006 – – One spring day in 2005, Frank Robinson had a little time between meetings and decided to drive through the old mixed-use commercial district next to the South Carolina Department of Mental Health (DMH) property on Bull Street. A

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*Richardson Plowden – New Office
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shareholder of the law firm Richardson, Plowden, Carpenter & Robinson, P.A., he was on a mission: the 35-attorney firm had outgrown its space at Taylor and Marion Streets and needed a new building for its Columbia practice. At the corner of Barnwell and Richland was exactly what Robinson was looking for: a 57,000-square-foot diamond in the rough, the old Dixie Electronics Warehouse.

The veteran attorney smiles as he recalls his partners' reaction to his discovery. "I thought it was prime real estate. My partners thought I was a little crazy. With the exception of a few pigeons, the warehouse had been empty for years and it was little more than a great big empty box surrounded by weeds," Robinson says.

Crazy like a fox is more like it. Eighteen months later, the new Richardson Plowden Building is a showplace, its 32,500-square-feet of up-fitted space home to a state-of-the-art conference and mediation center, an expansive lobby and waiting area, a computerized law library, 45 attorney offices, nearly 100 staff offices, and an additional 24,500 square feet for future expansion. The two-acre lot—half a city block—has surface parking on all four sides, a convenience for clients and guests and a boon for firm employees.

Then there's the location. Just five blocks from Main Street and a block south from the soon to be redeveloped DMH property, the Richardson Plowden Building is on the front-end of a growing number of revitalization projects. Across the street is a recently renovated professional building. One block down is a new medical office building. A new Columbia fire station is nearby. As rental rates soar downtown and in the Vista, "City Side" just may be the hot new professional area.

"That's certainly what we're hoping for," says Richardson Plowden shareholder and attorney Frank Smith, who oversaw the renovation of the firm's new-old building. "The area has tremendous potential. We were fortunate to find an existing structure that would allow us to create an environment for our clients, attorneys, and staff that would work today, but also 10, 20 years from now."

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A state-of-the-art law environment

According to Smith, the firm's new building was designed with the help of Curt Davis & Associates Architects to accommodate today's technology-dependent legal world and preserve the professionalism, comfort, and confidentiality clients expect from their law firms. The new building has much more space dedicated to conference and mediation rooms and client waiting areas than the firm's old building on Marion Street.

"We now have eight conference rooms located immediately off the lobby so clients and attorneys can go straight to a private meeting room. The largest conference room can accommodate up to 60 people and has a retractable video screen for presentations and video conferencing. The entire conference center is WI-FI ready so attorneys and clients can access the Internet at any time. All of the rooms are wired for data and media, which allows our attorneys and clients to review any kind of documents or evidence with ease regardless of the format, physical or electronic," Smith says.

The expansive conference center is necessary because of the growing demand for mediation services from local and national clients, Smith says. It is not unusual for a mediation to require multiple rooms at one time. "Before we were somewhat limited in what we could handle. With eight private meeting rooms, we can now handle just about anything," he explains.

Attorney offices line the perimeter of the building and each has a window. The attorney offices are the same size so the firm can easily add people or move them to new areas within the building. Smith says this was done to support the firm's practice group structure.

"We are aligning our attorneys into specific areas of law or 'practice groups.' As we refine these specialty areas, we want the flexibility of locating people alongside others in their group. Because all offices are the same, it's much easier to move," Smith explains.

Richardson Plowden's office also has less space set aside for its law library. The walls of law books have been replaced by computerized volumes, which make information far more accessible via attorney's computer desktops. The firm's information technology (IT) and accounting departments now occupy the space a law library would have had in the past.

Watch this space

Richardson Plowden moved into the new building in July, prior to completion. Although a little inconvenient for employees who had to dodge construction workers, decorators and delivery people, others found it entertaining.

“One day there was no landscaping, the next day we had grass and trees,” says Katrina Riley, director of Human Resources. “The biggest thrill for me was the artwork. One day I came in and thought I was walking into a museum or art gallery. I was blown away.”

Interior designer Katherine Anderson commissioned local artist Laurie McIntosh to paint four large canvases for the Richardson Plowden lobby. The scenes are meant to capture Columbia’s colorful landmarks and add color to the firm.

“People expect old prints of ships and birds. We wanted to be different so we have big, bold paintings of the Statehouse dome, Adluh Flour, the South Carolina Supreme Court and Trinity Episcopal Church,” Smith says. “They are conversation starters.”

There is more work to be done. The building has about 24,500 square feet of raw space. Uses for the space are the topic of many discussions among Richardson Plowden attorneys and staffers. Smith has fielded requests ranging from an indoor basketball court to an employee fitness center to covered parking. Right now the empty space is used for storage.

“No, we’re not sure what we’ll do with it,” smiles Smith, “but at the rate we’re growing, it will probably be new attorney offices.”

About Richardson Plowden

Established in 1973, Richardson, Plowden, Carpenter & Robinson, P.A., is among the 15 largest law firms in South Carolina, with more than 30 attorneys in offices in Columbia and Myrtle Beach. A full service law firm, Richardson Plowden more than 25 practice areas providing legal counsel to local, state and national clients. For more information, visit www.rpclaw.com.