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Olympia Development constructs 60,000 s/f Custom House Sq. building for Council on International Educational Exchange

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Portland is a city well-known for the historic beauty and significance of much of its architecture. Aesthetically pleasing for visitors and residents alike, but a bona fide challenge to any developer looking to add to the built environment with consistency and contextual style.

That's just what's happening in downtown with Olympia Development's construction of the Custom House Sq. project, a 60,000 s/f, \$10 million commercial office/condominium project located in the city's historic district. The building is a build to suit for the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE).

Given that the site has history in every direction, the building is actually attached to the famous W.L. Blake, an 1860s historic warehouse building, and adjacent to the 1873 Italianate-style, granite Custom House Building, the challenges facing the project have been varied and, at times, substantial.

And those hurdles haven't been lost on Jim Brady, president of Olympia Development. "Since it's in an historic district of downtown, the site is very tight, only 10,000 s/f with zero clearance," he said. "And, since abutters on both sides are historic structures, we wanted to use complimenting design features. But we also wanted a building of its own time, a bit more contemporary, not merely trying to mimic the other buildings around it."

Designed by David Lloyd of Archetype Architects (with PCI Architects as the production architect), the Custom House Sq.'s most dramatic features are a glass storefront, extending from floor to ceiling, and a fully glazed exterior with copper banding. Another special feature is a rain screen system comprised of cementitious fiberboard that offers weather protection for the underlying waterproofing system. The interior will feature a broad, open environment for office space.

Although the building will showcase state-of-the-art design and construction, Custom House Sq. will nonetheless become a consistent part of the overall historic architectural feel of the area.

"We made certain to use high quality materials, but also historic and authentic materials that will stand the test of the time as other buildings in this area have already done," said Brady. "Part of the process to obtain permits for the project was being sensitive to a very unique structure next door. We didn't want to compete with it."

Although the building is slated for a formal opening this month, it's already receiving unqualified praise from a variety of people involved in the project's development.

"It's met every expectation we may have had about the building and then some," said Steve Trooboff, chief executive officer for CIEE. "To say we're completely wowed would probably be an understatement."

However challenging the Custom House Sq. project has been in terms of historic continuity, it's a

challenge with which Olympia is fast becoming comfortable. One example is the company's development of the Hilton Garden Inn in downtown Portsmouth, N.H., a 131-guestroom hotel and 21-unit condominium project that opened in May 2006. Like the Custom House Sq. project, the Hilton Garden Inn was carefully designed and built to fit seamlessly into the historic northern tier section of Portsmouth.

Olympia has also established itself as a premier developer of environmentally sound buildings with the completion of a \$4 million medical office building on Sewall St. in Portland; the first commercial building in Maine to be LEED Certified by the U.S. Green Building Council. LEED is an acronym for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design.

"We feel our work in environmentally progressive as well as historically significant projects strikes a nice balance for our firm," said Brady. "On the one hand, we're looking to highlight and preserve the past. At the same time, we're looking to the future with projects that offer buildings that are energy efficient and healthy for those who use them."

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