

Friday, August 6, 2010

North Lamar building redone to better fit trendy Austin neighborhood

Austin Business Journal - by [Francisco Vara-Orta](#) ABJ Staff

Here's a recipe for making one of Austin's most remarkable building transformations of late: Take a 1970s-era, 31,000-square-foot medical office building in an up-and-coming area, tear down its bland facade, let Michael Hsu's Design Office make it over, and have a prolific retail leasing company fill it. Within 18 months, it's nearly fully leased despite the economy.

The two-story project, simply known as 4200 Lamar for its location along North Lamar Boulevard, is a mixed-use development that's 88 percent leased with tenants having high-profile Austin ties such as Uchi's second eatery named Uchiko and TacoDeli.

The project's renovation shows that while new construction for projects the size of 4200 Lamar is nearly nonexistent, adaptive reuse is still hot where demand and financing can meet, real estate experts said.

4200 **Lamar Partners** Ltd., a limited partnership assembled by the Austin office of **Cencor** Realty Services and the **Weitzman Group**, bought the building in December 2008 with the intention of moving its headquarters there from downtown. The building, formerly a call center for Seton Family of Hospitals, is in the Rosedale neighborhood where Lamar Boulevard has grown into a trendy retail and restaurant corridor as a result of the Triangle mixed-use project and Central Market.

"We really wanted to create something that is a great place not just for us but for the neighborhood," said Scott Freid, who heads up Cencor/Weitzman's Austin operations and spearheaded the project.

Freid said Cencor had secured financing from its bank in summer 2008 before the recession hit, which it honored when the real estate firm wanted to buy the property later that year. Then, Cencor spent more than a year and \$1.5 million on an extensive redevelopment and remodeling of the building. **Michael Hsu Design Office** redesigned the exterior, and **Blue and Associates** was the general contractor. Both firms also handled the design and construction of Uchiko.

"What made this challenging was that we had to convert this one large building that seemed impenetrable and that was a boring call center into a vibrant, warm and inviting building refashioned to fit many smaller tenants," Hsu said. "We recycled as much as we could and kept the guts of the building, but we added a lot of window space and landscaping to open it up on both the inside and from the outside."

The first floor of 4200 was converted to retail space for a lineup of largely Austin-based concepts such as Roberto Espinosa's TacoDeli and Uchiko, operated by Tyson Cole. Tenants started moving in February, with Uchiko being the most recent to open last month.

"We had been looking for a couple of years to set up a second restaurant elsewhere but couldn't find the right space," Cole said. "But we love being in this neighborhood and along Lamar where our first location is down the street. It's got great exposure — from the location to its street visibility."

Cole said the 4200 Lamar location offers more space, which enables more reservations to be taken — a well-known challenge at Uchi's smaller bungalow on South Lamar.

Other concepts at 4200 include Floyd's 99 **Barber Shop**; My Fit Foods, which specializes in healthful, prepared foods; and Hounds-tooth Coffee. But the medical office connection is not lost. Dentist Michael Moossy will open an office there in September.

The Weitzman Group and Cencor Realty Services took most of the second floor with 9,000 square feet. Freid said he happily overlooks traffic along Lamar with bright sun illuminating his company's offices. Of the building's 31,488 square feet, there's still about 2,200 square feet left to lease.

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