

## PORTLAND BUSINESS JOURNAL

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# Mission's new rehab center takes shape in Old Town

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Constructing a modern building in one of Portland's most historic and dense districts is no small feat.

But that's just what Sera Architects Inc. and [Hoffman Construction Co.](#) are doing with the [Union Gospel Mission's LifeChange Center](#). Hoffman began constructing the center in January of this year and expects to complete the building in December.

First, Sera had to design a modern building that still maintained the feel of its historic Old Town/Chinatown neighborhood.

The Portland-based architects mixed old and new by including cantilevers in their design, which the project's job captain, Chad Sanderson, called "a reasonable modern interpretation" of the ornate cornices that decorate the tops of other buildings in the neighborhood.

Led by project designer and Sera principal Kurt Schultz, Sera also designed two different facades for the LifeChange building. The side facing West Burnside Street uses lots of glass for a more modern feel; the side facing Northwest Third Avenue is more traditional. That's because the building sits next to the Union Gospel Mission's longtime home at 15 N.W. Third Ave.

The mission has been serving the area's homeless with a variety of services including provision of meals and clothes since the Depression.

The new 28,500-square-foot, \$7 million LifeChange Center will allow the nonprofit to more than double the number of people it can serve through LifeChange, a years-long rehabilitation program for alcohol and drug addicts. The increased space will also mean shorter lines of people waiting outside for meals.

Sera architects had to familiarize themselves with the addiction recovery program and the other people Union Gospel Mission serves in order to design the LifeChange Center.

The five-story building will house 75 men and women in quarters varying from dormitory-style to private rooms.

As LifeChange participants work their way through the program, they get upgraded rooms. The dorm-style rooms have windows facing a courtyard that connects the new center and the existing Union Gospel building. Group bathrooms and showers grace the same floor.

Other floors house two-person rooms with private bath and group showers. The most coveted rooms have private showers for men and bathtubs for women and great, bay windows facing Burnside Street.

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The quarters' differing window views reflect the program's cycles. People new to the program must face a "blackout period" that limits contact with the outside world and encourages introversion -- hence, the view of the courtyard -- while senior participants farther along in the program have views that face out into the world.

The building also will hold five to six classrooms, a library, common rooms on each floor, and administrative offices for Union Gospel staff, which were previously housed in a separate building a few blocks away.

The ground level of the building will be an open common area with a lot of glass where Union Gospel will hold religious services, distribute sack lunches and house its clothing store. Because it will be such a high-traffic area, Sera pushed a palette of highly durable materials, said Sanderson, including carpet, vinyl composite tile, steel, concrete ceilings and exposed vents.

The majority of the budget went to the shell of the building, but Sera's design brings warmth to the interior with different paint colors for each floor.

LifeChange participants will assist Hoffman Construction in some of the interior painting, said Hoffman's Kevin Cady, project manager. Many of the program's clients either work within the Union Gospel facility performing maintenance and other jobs.

Working with the LifeChange participants and Union Gospel staff has made this "more than a business deal" for Hoffman Construction, Cady said. "The project has a great spirit of coordination."

Hoffman has faced the difficult task of coordinating schedules for tradesmen to come work at a construction site with limited parking and that sits on what is perhaps downtown Portland's busiest thoroughfare.

Otherwise, the project has been fairly straightforward, said Cady.

Early on, Sera and Hoffman abandoned plans to retrofit the existing cellar space for a basement. Instead, Hoffman filled in the space with gravel and concrete. Renovating the basement would have cost too much money and slowed construction by a month, said Sanderson. Two century-old buildings previously occupied the site.

The project was conceived in 2001. Before construction could begin, though, 9/11 hit and funding for the new building dried up.

It took two years to raise the necessary funds: \$4 million in donations and the remaining \$3 million through the federal New Market Tax Credit program. The program, created by the Clinton administration, induces banks and other investors to spend money in economically distressed neighborhoods. It is administered in Portland through the Portland Family of Funds and the [Portland Development Commission](#).

When funds finally came through, Sera and Hoffman had to knock the dust off the plans.

Luckily, most of the permits were still valid, though Sera had to go back over materials and adjust the budget, a challenge for all parties involved, said Sanderson.

Hoffman and Sera's long-standing working relationship on this and other projects eased the headaches, said Sanderson.

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