



THESE WALLS: CAREATC HEADQUARTERS

Touches of Mother Nature

BY KIRBY LEE DAVIS
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TULSA – CareATC faced a classic question with its new Corporate Woods office park headquarters: How do you bring new life to an old data center?

The Tulsa-based workplace clinic operator came up with this solution: install a dozen skylights to open up the closed area, with wide walkways, plentiful glass within the interior walls, and an indoor garden carved out of the 2-foot elevated floor.

“They’ve got one of the coolest spaces in the whole city,” said Jared Andresen, managing director of Newmark Grubb Levy Strange Beffort’s Tulsa office, which handles leasing for the 569,000-square-foot Corporate Woods complex. “It’s amazing what creative minds can do.”

Those elevated floors signal the age and intent of that portion of Corporate Woods, which Occidental Petroleum built in the early 1980s to serve as its Tulsa research and data center. While such floors provide advantages accessing plumbing, wires or other infrastructure, they also can create bouncy echo chambers that may unnerve some workers. Cooling and security issues also meant such facilities lacked windows, which can irritate employees.

“I’m an individual that gets really claustrophobic,” CareATC Chief Executive Philip Kurtz said. “I don’t like to go into restaurants that don’t have windows.”

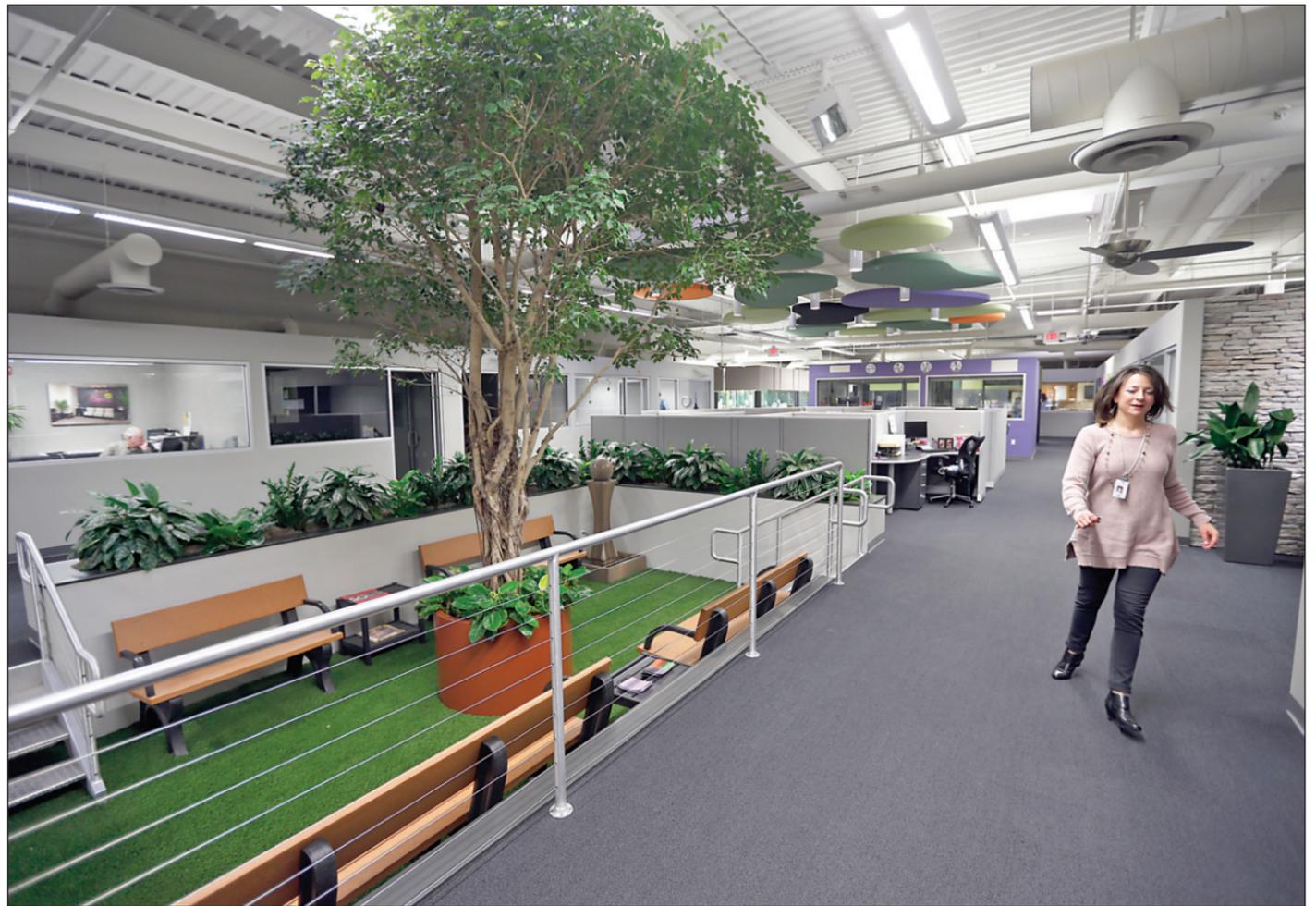
For Keith Gucwa, who normally designs CareATC clinics, the 2012 headquarters move to 4500 S. 129th East Avenue, Suite 191, provided a nice change of pace.

“To me, it was just a blank canvas,” said Gucwa, director of purchasing and facilities. “It was an interior space, so I used skylights. I used acoustic clouds to control the noise bouncing around, so it didn’t sound like a cave.”

The centerpiece garden injects a park setting and sounds to the 15,000-square-foot office.

“We refer to it as the Pit,” said Gucwa, referring to its sunken nature.

Descending to the foundation, the Pit builds its focus around a 16-foot ficus tree that rises under a 5-by-12-foot skylight. Its branches can be seen from several parts of the workplace.



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A water wall flows among an assortment of other flora around the tree.

“The skylight wasn’t quite enough light to keep these plants alive, so we do have some high-intensity grow lights that stay on from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. to make sure these plants stay on living,” Gucwa said.

The Pit’s sights and sounds provide a soothing accompaniment to the work environment.

“The plants were not difficult, but the tree was quite a feat,” Gucwa said of the installation. “We brought a full-grown tree in, and it’s extremely heavy. They brought it in on kind of like piano dollies, on its side, and then hoisted it up on its side and set it up.”

CareATC extended this styling through multiple expansions, the latest now in the design stage to extend the office to 20,000 square feet. This expansion, underway with the Tulsa architectural firm Kinslow Keith and Todd, will give CareATC an outside entrance and conference room with windows to the outside world.



“It’s still an ongoing process,” Gucwa said of the headquarters build-out. “We’re still in the process of getting the right furniture in here, getting the right wall art, those kind of things.”

Kurtz and Gucwa may install a series of high-definition artificial windows throughout the interior, able to present a changing array of live outdoor scenes.

That would augment an existing set of screens displaying changing, timely business information.

“It’s worked really well,” Kurtz said of the office setting. “I think we have a truly unique design here. We’ve taken space that would be really fit only for computers, put some skylights in and a lot of interesting office design and features, and made it work.”



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