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News

DRAMATIC, LIGHT-FILLED BUILDING CELEBRATES RITES OF AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP

4240 Architecture designs a federal facility wrapped in glass and filled with light; the oath of citizenship is emblazoned on the exterior, visible from a distance.



The facility, which has the stature of a government building, is designed to be welcoming to immigrants.

Dallas [Irving], TX and Chicago, IL, May 3, 2007 – “This is the place. The place where new citizens will take the oath of citizenship in support of the constitution. It cannot be old and antiquated...it must be new and forward-looking – most importantly inclusive,” stated Kristi Barrows, director of the new Citizenship and Immigration Services [USCIS] Building for the Department of Homeland Security [DHS] in Irving, Texas.

With that sentiment, Ms. Barrows welcomed the facility’s staff to participate in the groundbreaking of their new home, on April 12, 2007, with hundreds of golden plastic spoons indicating the importance of every individual. The groundbreaking was a “perfect metaphor for a government run by the people.”



“I Will Support”: The most essential words in the naturalization ceremony wrap the exterior in supergraphic lettering. Sunlight projects the oath onto the floors.

The new facility, designed by **4240 Architecture**, will house the USCIS’ Dallas office. Located in a growing office district, the two-story, 50,000-sf building replaces two separate USCIS offices. In 2003, the Department of Homeland Security absorbed USCIS, which is in the process of relocating or updating most of its approximately 250 headquarters and field offices around the world. The Irving facility’s lease was procured under the U.S. General Services Administration’s leasing program. This project is the third DHS building to be completed or under construction by developer JDL Castle Corporation of Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

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The Dallas district office of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services replaces two USCIS offices that were formerly separate.

The architecture of the building, to be completed early next year, supports the mission of the Citizenship and Immigration Services to be protective and inclusive. According to Robert Benson, 4240 Architecture’s Chicago Studio design director, “The Irving facility has the stature of a United States Government building. At the same time, it is approachable and not imposing to immigrants seeking assistance and citizenship status.” Benson, lead designer on this project, was selected this year for the *Building Design + Construction*’s international list of “40 under 40” rising stars.



Each of the oversized letters is formed from a cutout of the actual U.S. Constitution. This becomes apparent when the letters are viewed up close.

Besides improving the USCIS’s ability to provide full-service immigration and benefits services, the Irving building has been designed to celebrate the experience of becoming an American Citizen. Simultaneously approachable and dramatic, the architecture will stand as a beacon along Highway 114.

Supergraphics on the façade will be a key feature of the new facility. Clearly legible from the nearby highway, they project the resonant opening words of the Oath of Citizenship: “I will support and defend the Constitution and the Laws of the United States.”

The location and L-shape layout of the field office will enable USCIS to improve its level of service and make a “great work environment” for what the agency calls “our customers” as well as its employees, Benson explains. A full-service office, it meets USCIS’s goal of transforming its field and district offices into community-based processing facilities that offer comprehensive resources.

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The centerpiece of the building is the Ceremony Room. New Americans take the oath of citizenship in this soaring space that is filled with light.

The focal point of the building is the Ceremony Room, a light-filled, double-height glass space that is visible from adjacent Highway 114. The rest of the building has candidate interview rooms and administrative offices for 140 employees.

The four-foot-high supergraphic lettering that wraps the Ceremony Room creates a billboard of sorts for the most essential words in the naturalization ceremony. When the words are viewed up close, it becomes apparent that each letter is formed from a cutout reproduced from the actual U.S. Constitution. As the sun passes overhead, the oath is also reflected onto the floor of the Ceremony Room. USCIS plans to adopt this feature in its future buildings.

The new facility, whose design is consistent with federal sustainability policies, is a candidate for silver LEED™ status. Energy-efficient features of the building include architectural overhangs and sun shades to provide protection from the Texas sun. A pergola with sun-shading louvers protects the Ceremony Room and public lobby. Many materials, including brick, will come from local manufacturers. Building systems and fixtures will conserve energy and natural resources.

Background: 4240 Architecture, a talented team of architects, planners and interior designers, is a new iteration of a firm formed in the 1970s. 4240 designs buildings, community frameworks, and spaces ranging from entire neighborhoods, resorts, and commercial architecture to interiors and private homes. Established in 2003, the firm's offices in Chicago [located at 42° latitude] and Denver [located at 40° latitude] comprise "4240." In just four years, the firm has grown into an 80-person team of professionals who are equally fluent in designing for urban settings and high-mountain properties – and for just about every context in between. For more information, please visit 4240 Architecture's Web site at www.4240arch.com.