

The Columbus Dispatch

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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2012

Nationwide's new building opens doors in Arena District

By Steve Wartenberg

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Calling it one of the final and most-important pieces of the Arena District, Nationwide opened its new \$37 million office building yesterday.

The first 300 of an expected 1,000 employees moved from the company's Dublin offices to the new space.

The remainder will move in over the next month.

"This is a linchpin building, one of the last key pieces in the Arena District's development," said Brian Ellis, president of Nationwide Realty Investors, the insurance company's real-estate development arm and developer of the Arena District.

The 75-acre Arena District includes sports and entertainment venues, more than 1.5 million square feet of office space, about 500 residential units and numerous restaurants.

"This is another building block in the renaissance of our city," said Mayor Michael B. Coleman, who toured the building yesterday with company and other city officials.

"More jobs mean more revenue for the city, and this will be a great marketing tool to leverage others to come Downtown," he said.

A reason this project is so important, Ellis said, is its location, on Nationwide Boulevard between N. High and Front streets, near the city's convention center and the recently opened Hilton

Columbus Downtown.

A section of the northwest corner of N. High Street and Nationwide Boulevard was acquired from the Norfolk Southern railroad and has been converted into an urban pocket park.

The 1,000 new employees will push Nationwide's Downtown work force to about 9,200, Ellis said.

More than 900 of the employees moving in will come from the company offices at 5900 Parkwood Place in Dublin, with the remainder coming from its 5100 Rings Rd. location.

About 4,000 employees will remain in Dublin.

The new office will be home to the company's Nationwide Financial retirement-plans business.

"Dublin is wonderful, but our building was isolated," said Larry Hilsheimer, president of Nationwide's retirement plans.

"Everyone is excited about moving Downtown," he said. "It's such a vibrant area. We're near Nationwide's headquarters (which are across the street), and it's a brand-new building."

The building features floor-to-ceiling windows throughout, lower cubicle walls and a ground-floor cafeteria that looks out on the park.

"This will provide a more open environment, more natural light and will lead to more interaction between associates," Hilsheimer said. ■