

The Columbus Dispatch

FRIDAY, MAY 27, 2016

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Nationwide opens Grandview Yard building to bring workers closer

By Mark Williams
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Nationwide's multi-year effort to bring its Columbus workforce closer together took a big step this week.

The insurer officially opened its first office building in its new corporate campus at Grandview Yard at 1000 Yard St. The four-story, 330,000-square-foot building eventually will be home to 1,900 Nationwide workers, who began moving in this week.

A second office building, about half that size, is being constructed next door and is expected to open late this year.

When complete, the two buildings will have about 3,000 workers at the site, putting them within two miles of 11,150 employees Nationwide has at its corporate offices at the Downtown area.

"It makes the most efficient and effective way to run our business and meet the needs of our policyholders," said Brian Ellis, president and COO of Nationwide Realty Investors, Nationwide's real-estate arm and the developer of Grandview Yard. "We are always trying to do it better."

"This is a significant step in that process," Kieran Sherry, Nationwide's vice president of corporate real estate, said of the new building and Nationwide's plans to relocate workers. "It give us an opportunity to overhaul our Columbus alignment."

Columbus' core has taken on a more significant role for Nationwide in recent years.

In 2010, Nationwide had fewer than 8,000 workers Downtown in 2010 when it announced it was moving 1,400 jobs from Dublin to Downtown. By the end of this year, that number will grow 11,650.

Nationwide said then that the move was being done, in part, to help bring workers together who were scattered over several sites in Dublin. That move was announced before plans for Grandview Yard were revealed.

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The moves will reduce the number of Nationwide workers in Dublin from about 5,000 to 900. Dublin-based Cardinal Health has said it plans to take over some of the space being vacated by Nationwide.

Also, the insurer has brought more jobs to Columbus from other cities as part of a corporate-wide realignment. The number of Nationwide workers Downtown is expected to grow by another 500 this year.

By year-end, the insurer will have about 16,000 workers in central Ohio and nearly all of them will be at multiple sites Downtown or in Grandview.

While the new jobs aren't Downtown, they are much closer than the suburbs and that's good news for the city's core, said Cleve Ricksecker, executive director of Downtown Capital Crossroads.

“The move to Grandview Yard from the Outerbelt is a very positive move. It reinforces the center city and reinforces every neighborhood in the central city,” he said.

Working Downtown or in a nearby suburb like Grandview Heights means it's more likely that people will live within a 30 minute commute, he said.

“That strengthens and stabilizes neighborhoods between Downtown and the Outerbelt,” Ricksecker said. “It's very important to keep jobs in the center of the region. They (Nationwide) have made a huge commitment to Downtown.”

Nationwide is by far the largest private employer Downtown. Downtown—basically the region bounded by the Scioto River on the west, Interstate 70 on the south, Interstate 670

on the north and Fifth Avenue on the east—has about 49,000 private-sector workers. Counting state government workers, the number balloons to about 65,000 to 70,000 workers.

“Just by the scale of the commitment, Nationwide is a league of its own,” Ricksecker said. “Nationwide is a very effective advocate and presence for Downtown.”

Grandview Yard is a 125-acre sprawling development of retail, housing and offices being developed on the site of the former Big Bear supermarket warehouse.

The new building is similar to a structure Nationwide opened at Front Street and Nationwide Boulevard in the Arena District that now house 1,200 workers. It has wide-open areas meant to foster collaboration. The buildings have a courtyard, workout facility and a restaurant.

Workers in the new building will perform a variety of functions, including sales and service for those with Nationwide policies. Some of the workers who already have moved in are call-center employees selling Nationwide policies and assisting customers with claims.

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Each building also has a parking garage. Nationwide is considering building a third office at Grandview Yard.

Nationwide Realty took aspects of similar developments it has put together in Des Moines, Iowa, and San Antonio as part of the design.

The buildings are meant to provide a flexible working environment so that the company can shift workers around easily. An entry-level staffer in the new building in Grandview Yard could easily move into several different jobs over the course of a career and remain in the building, Ellis said.

“We've accomplished a lot,” Ellis said on Thursday while giving a tour of the new building. “This is a milestone for us to open this building. But we have a lot more to do.” ■
