



GRAPHIC: POWER ENGINEERS

THE ART OF CREATING COMFORTABLE SPACES

New VA clinic.

A screenshot from a “fly-by” model of the new Veterans Affairs Imaging and Radiology Clinic, created by POWER Designer Tracy Bird. The main entrance on the north side of the building is shown.

POWER designs for America’s veterans

By Kelcie Moseley

As POWER-Tacoma Healthcare Planner Mary Valmonte will tell you, designing a medical facility is much more than walls, doors and ceilings – especially if that facility is designed for our United States veterans.

Like many projects, POWER Architectural Project Manager Ray Vefik says this project started out with a problem the Veterans Affairs Administration needed to solve. Veterans who live in Vancouver, Washington, did not have access to a local VA facility for services such as X-rays, CT scans, MRIs or ultrasounds as of a few years ago. If they needed those services, they were taken to Portland by ambulance, which can take up to an hour and a half depending on traffic.

Interactive design

The VA released an RFP to build an imaging and radiology clinic on an existing site in Vancouver in 2015, and POWER won the work as part of a joint venture with a mechanical engineering firm called Enginuity Systems LLC. The \$8.4 million, 14,000 building gross square foot, multi-story facility replaced an aging wood-frame structure on the Vancouver VA campus that was

formerly home to the Mental Health Services Center. Vefik says the VA relocated the center and rebuilt it elsewhere on the campus.

POWER and Enginuity assembled a team of small businesses to help complete the work and worked with the Portland VA to develop the design. A large part of the design development included 3D modeling in Revit, which isn’t a new concept to most POWER designers. But to the VA, it was a new and vital tool. The 3D approach allowed the medical staff to feel like they were in the space as it would ultimately look.

“Mary and I used what’s called interactive design – we put the Revit model up on the screen in front of the medical staff and they were working together in real time,” Vefik says. “That’s very important, because you can move a wall or move equipment – like an injector arm in the CT room – and they see it. When they saw the injector arm in the 3D model, they said ‘You’ve got it on the wrong side,’ and we were able to move it before it was too late during the construction phase.”

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The project team also set up a “fly-by” model of the building and made it accessible to the VA leadership to show where patient

and staff entrances and exits would be situated, which includes a new covered link back to the main hospital.

“Normally they’re concentrating on the inside, but the fly-by effectively shows how patients are to be transported to and from the new building, and it helped the medical staff connect all the pieces of the puzzle so they understood the flow,” Vefik says. “Chief of Imaging and Nuclear Medicine Dr. Ronald Boucher complimented the design team by saying, ‘This is the way [the VA] should be designing our buildings in the future.’”

Mindful communication

Throughout the project, Vefik says the relationship between POWER’s design team and VA officials was the standout component of the effort. He charged himself with constant, mindful communication with the client, which helped keep the project on track with scheduling and budget considerations.

One example of budget vigilance came during the 35 percent submittal phase, when the cost estimate came in \$1 million over budget. Alarmed, Vefik and the Enginuity team notified the VA of the discrepancy and sat down with the project management team to go over adjustments that could be made. Through that process, the cost estimate at the 60 percent submittal turned out to be \$800,000 under budget. The VA told Vefik this proactive approach to problem solving was a valuable resource that they had not experienced with other design teams in the past.

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A holistic patient experience

While Vefik and others focused on the bones of the structure, Valmonte focused on the holistic experience of veterans at the clinic and the logistics of space.

“When we’re designing healthcare facilities, we’re designing facilities where people in their most vulnerable state are waiting in waiting areas,” Valmonte says. “They’re most likely at the lowest point in their lives.”

Considerations of comfort and ease are especially important for a facility that will serve veterans, Valmonte says. Patients may be struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder in addition to health issues, which can be triggered by the act of walking into the clinic.

Valmonte looks at human comfort and patient satisfaction, designing an entire experience. She also helps advise the staff about what equipment they might consider for a new clinic, which is



PHOTO: RAY VEFIK

Old to new.

The Imaging and Radiology Clinic will replace the aging Mental Health Services Center on the Vancouver Veterans Affairs campus (shown above). The center was relocated and rebuilt elsewhere on campus.

sometimes tricky because the medical field experiences rapid changes in specialty medical equipment technology, provider services and patient population growth. Valmonte says all she can do is provide the client with options that best meet the medical facility’s present needs and position them well for the future.

Valmonte also pointed out that veterans in a VA medical facility include not only the patients served, but the medical staff and facility maintenance staff as well.

“As much as our veterans have done for us, this is the least of what we could do for them,” she says. “It is our goal to try to get our veterans to feel that it’s OK to come to this hospital and get the treatment they need. We want to support them because they supported us – they put their lives on the line for us to protect our freedom and our safety.” 🐾

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