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CCIM: Q&A

## Creative Office Option

One CCIM finds opportunity in local GSA expansion.

As today's economy continues to challenge the office market, many commercial real estate professionals are thinking counterintuitively, look for specialized offices niches that defy the status quo. So far, the energy and healthcare markets have provided optimism, but one CCIM also has found success in government office properties. His current project, the expansion of an 34,200-square-foot call center into North America's largest Veterans Affairs regional office, will benefit his small market in many ways.

*Commercial Investment Real Estate* sat down with Jeff Roberts, CCIM, director of Roberts Properties in Muskogee, Okla., to discuss the nuances of working on a General Services Administrative project and how it will help his market.

**CIRE:** Is this the first GSA property you have worked with?

**Roberts:** No, I have been involved with GSA and government leasing for about eight years, starting with a response to a solicitation for offers. Since that time, I have continued working SFOs.

I became involved with the expansion and build-out of this particular GSA in 2005 when [the SFO] was first published. I responded to the solicitation and then GSA became my brokerage's tenant. The original structure was built by Safeway grocery. My partners and I purchased the vacant property for redevelopment in 2004 and currently still own and manage the property.

When GSA decided the center was in need of expansion in April of this year, I worked with them to secure and sign a new solicitation.

**CIRE:** What was your role in the project?

**Roberts:** My role in this project was consulting, communication, negotiations, and leasing. Once the lease was finalized and signed, I passed the project on to my apprentice who will run the torch on this through completion. I do, however, continue to monitor the project.

**CIRE:** How does working on a GSA project differ from working with private-sector properties?

**Roberts:** Working with GSA is more challenging than the private sector: timelines are strict, tenant needs are high, and time is of the essence. From my experience, the private sector allows for more-flexible and less-challenging criteria so the tasks and due diligence are easier to manage.

**CIRE:** How will the final product help Muskogee's office market?

**Roberts:** A small community, Muskogee will benefit from this in a number of ways. The most significant, in my opinion, will be the addition of nearly 500 new jobs. For a community that hovers around 40,000 and shows signs of stagflation, these new jobs will be a welcome addition.

The additional jobs will have pay structures that will aid Muskogee's per capita [income] as well as help the housing market and begin to circulate money in the community through local restaurants, retail, banks, and other goods and services.



Jeff Roberts, CCIM, is the director of real estate of Roberts Properties LLC in Muskogee, Okla. Contact him at (918) 682-9033 or [jeff@real-es.com](mailto:jeff@real-es.com).

--by Stephanie Bell, associated editor of *Commercial Investment Real Estate*

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**CIRE:** What other features will be added during the expansion and build-out?

**Roberts:** The call center will have state-of-the-art work stations, communications equipment, utility management, and security. Other features include large ceiling heights, wide walkways between cubicles, spacious break rooms, natural light, new stack-stone exterior, and restroom facilities with wall-to-wall imported granite as well as granite vessel sinks.

**CIRE:** When the project is complete, what will be the total square footage? How big was the building pre-expansion?

**Roberts:** When complete in mid-October, the call center will be a single-level 58,200-sf stand-alone building. The original call center was 34,200 sf, so overall; the expansion will add about 24,000 sf.

**CIRE:** What advice can you offer to other CCIMs on working with the GSA on real estate projects?

**Roberts:** Stay sharp, diligent, and always ready to help. GSA is an excellent tenant and easy to work with, but it can often be long hours, hard work, and high coordination all while using positive people skills. However, in the end, it is well worth the effort and will keep doors open for future projects.



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