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The Buggyworks offices near Huntington Park are currently undergoing renovation to become 130,000 square feet of office space.

Buggyworks offices expected to open in September

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THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Before there was an Arena District, when the Ohio Penitentiary still stood, there were plans to revitalize the buildings that started as the Columbus Buggy Works. After years of fits and starts, two of the buildings just west of what is now Huntington Park are in the process of being transformed into 145,000 square feet of office space.

Nationwide Realty Investors bought the buildings several years ago from longtime owner Kyle Katz, who developed the Buggyworks condos and operated the nightclub Mekka in one of the buildings in the mid-1990s. He had bigger plans that never materialized.

Brian Ellis, president of Nationwide Realty Investors, said that after considering a variety of uses for the buildings at 390 and 400 West Nationwide Blvd., it was decided that they were best suited to offices. There is almost no vacant office space currently in the core Arena District.

Most of the buildings in the Arena District were newly built, though their red brick exteriors were designed to blend with older buildings in the area. The larger of the two office buildings currently under renovation, the timber-frame Buggyworks building, is actually historic, dating to 1902.

"This offers something unique in the Arena District," Ellis said on a recent tour of the project, pointing out the wood beams and interior exposed brick that will remain when renovations are completed.

Nationwide is balancing the historic with the modern.

The company considered applying for historic tax credits for the project, Ellis said, but decided that designing the spaces for “modern use” would require more changes than allowed under historic-renovation restrictions.

They started by demolishing portions of the buildings that had been added on over the years and that blocked windows. Now there are sweeping views of Downtown and natural light. The brick walls weren’t insulated, which typically would mean that insulation would be added on the inside and covered with drywall. On the older building, the decision was made to keep the exposed brick on the inside and instead put the insulation on the outside—where the brick was badly weathered—and “re-brick” over that.

Nationwide is targeting September as a completion date for the offices. There are no signed tenants yet, but Ellis says Nationwide is in talks with prospective tenants.

Port Columbus revamp

Frequent travelers through Port Columbus know the airport terminal has been a big construction zone for the past couple of years. That will change March 23, when officials are set to celebrate the official completion of the \$80 million

terminal “modernization.”

The revamp is the latest for the terminal building, which dates to the 1950s. Included in the overhaul are cosmetic elements such as new flooring and lighting, as well as more practical and functional elements, such as upgraded restrooms and new jet bridges, used by passengers getting on and off planes.

But work never stops. After the interior is done, workers will move outside to begin work on the curb fronts on the arrivals and departures levels.

January construction

Columbus greatly outpaced the national average in January for growth in the value of nonresidential construction starts. According to Dodge Data & Analytics, the value of such projects started in the Columbus metro area (Franklin and surrounding counties) last month was 23 percent higher than in December. The national average was 2 percent.

The two largest projects cited by Dodge were a StoryPoint Senior Housing facility in Grove City and the HealthSouth/Mount Carmel Rehabilitation Hospital in Westerville. Both projects are valued at about \$15 million. ■