

An expanding telecommunications firm adds high-impact amenities to its Mankato headquarters, to the delight of its employees

# WAVE ACTION

By Camille LeFevre

Six short years ago, Mankato-based Midwest Wireless Communications, spurred by its own rapid growth, moved to a new headquarters on 12 acres at the east edge of the southwestern-Minnesota city. The 78,000-square-foot building—clad in gray and black granite-like precast concrete, architectural metals, and glass curtain wall—featured a circular two-story lobby, from which three wings radiate at 120-degree angles. With an eye toward future expansion, Paulsen Architects ensured that one of the rear exterior walls could later be removed to permit an addition. The need arrived sooner than expected. The company not only was desperate for more open office space but also wanted to add employee

amenities such as an auditorium, café, and eating area that would “encourage community within the corporation and on the campus,” says Paulsen Architects president Bryan Paulsen, AIA. “Our primary challenge,” explains designer Sally Obernolte, Assoc. AIA, “was to create a seamless flow from the existing building to the addition, and successfully capture their corporate vision without disturbing their strong existing corporate identity, projected by the main entrance.” So the Paulsen design team created a corridor leading from the lobby rotunda, past the display gallery and a 150-seat auditorium, and into the ClearWave Café and two-story dining area/atrium, one wall of which opens onto two levels of new office space.

At the same time, materials and lighting in each of the addition’s multipurpose spaces subtly take employees and visitors on a visual and aural journey from the heart of the building—the rotunda—through the addition, to the outside, seamlessly connecting old and new. The corridor’s first segment, for example, doubles as a display gallery of company products and history. In this windowless space with dark wall colors, a two-toned carpet pattern and a wave-edged lower ceiling mute sound and enhance intimacy. These floor and ceiling design elements flow into the next section of corridor adjacent to the auditorium, but the colors become lighter and the flooring changes to stamped concrete and carpet.

## MIDWEST WIRELESS ADDITION

<b>Location:</b> Mankato, Minnesota	<b>General contractor:</b> Robert W. Carlstrom Co., Inc.
<b>Client:</b> Midwest Wireless	<b>Size:</b> 55,000 square feet
<b>Architect:</b> Paulsen Architects <a href="http://www.paulsen-arch.com">www.paulsen-arch.com</a>	<b>Cost:</b> \$6.3 million
<b>Principal-in-charge:</b> Bryan Paulsen, AIA	<b>Completion date:</b> July 2004
<b>Project lead designers:</b> Bryan Paulsen, AIA; Sally Obernolte, Assoc. AIA	<b>Photographer:</b> Jerry Swanson Photography
<b>Landscape designer:</b> McRae Anderson, McCaren Designs, Inc.	

*The transition zone between the existing building and the addition is made up of a series of spaces that graduate—in forms, light, and materials—from an indoor to an outdoor feel.*





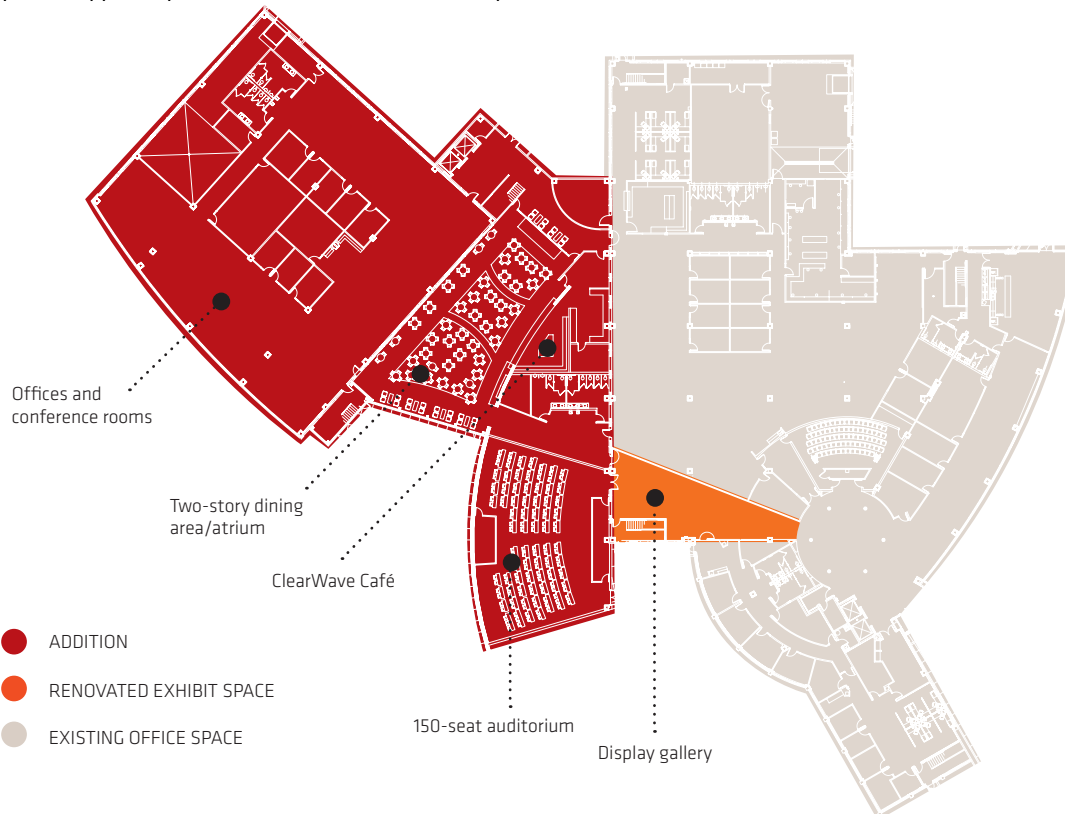
The gallery features products and items highlighting the corporation's history, with the centerpiece being a sculptural miniature of one of the company's phone towers.

The space then opens up into the daylit two-story atrium with its steel-and-glass curtain wall, second-level walkway, uncovered industrial ceiling, and stamped-concrete floor. A 24-foot-high water feature and indoor garden create a strong focal point at the curtain wall that leads the eye and the feet to the patio outdoors. "Our notion was that our employees work in a cubicle all day long, so we wanted to provide an open, sunny environment where they could feel like they're outside, rejuvenate, and then head back into their cubicles," explains Midwest Wireless CEO Dennis Miller. Opposite the glass wall, at the back of the atrium, is the ClearWave Café, which features structural supports wrapped in pre-finished metal.

Because Midwest Wireless is a community-minded corporate citizen, the addition's corridors, state-of-the-art auditorium (with alternating cherry-wood wall panels and blue-gray acoustical panels), and atrium can be secured for public use. "Paulsen did such a great job on our initial structure, designing to the needs of our organization so the building supports our work and facilitates our progress, that it was easy to engage them again," Miller enthuses. "They had fantastic ideas about the addition," he adds, "and created a seamless extension of our existing building." And should Midwest Wireless grow yet again, the addition's northwest wall can be easily removed, making way for future expansion. AMN



The two-story atrium, with its glass-and-steel curtain wall, provides employees with an indoor/outdoor space for relaxing, dining, and informal meetings with colleagues.



Midwest Wireless wanted employee amenities such as an auditorium, café, and eating area that would "encourage community within the corporation and on the campus."