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Wausau and W.L. Hall Help Build Elegant Offices and Safe Neighborhoods

Wausau, Wis. – Minnesota Life’s new corporate office tower, one of many new construction projects completed in downtown St. Paul, Minn., draws attention for both its elegant design and its focus on safety. Essential to the building’s design was its glass and granite curtainwall system provided by Wausau Window and Wall Systems® and installed by Minnesota-based glazing contractor W.L. Hall and Company.

Minnesota Life’s 635,000-square-foot building, located at 401 N. Robert Street, opened in November 2000. Designed by Minneapolis-based Architectural Alliance and built by St. Paul-based McGough Construction, the \$102 million, 13-story structure offers businesses, retail tenants and visitors a distinct environment designed to promote neighborhood safety while complementing the insurance company’s main headquarters, which connects to the new building via skyways.

The first St. Paul building designed to adhere to the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), Architectural Alliance combined architecture and landscape design to manage traffic flows, improve surveillance and curtail crime.

Selecting Wausau’s 6250 SuperWall system played an important part in setting the building’s look and feel. Scott Sorenson, design architect at Architectural Alliance says that due to W. L. Hall and Co. and Wausau’s technical assistance and design detailing, he was able to choose a system that guaranteed performance without sacrificing the aesthetic vision.

For more than three decades, W.L. Hall and Wausau have worked together to shape the Twin Cities landscape including a prior Minnesota Life building in the early 1980s. In finalizing the design of this new facility, Wausau also worked hand-in-hand with curtainwall consultants W.J. Higgins and Associates.

The 20-foot walls of glass on three of the first floor’s four sides follow CPTED’s basic premise that people working in buildings should be able to look out onto sidewalks and courtyards. The floor-to-ceiling glass also allows pedestrians to look into the building’s first floor restaurants and retail spaces.

“The use of glass and light is central to the CPTED guidelines,” emphasizes Sorenson. “Lights on the outside of the building help light the sidewalk and façade and expose all the nooks and crannies of the building. The use of glass as walls allows natural light to come in from outside, as well as let the lobby’s artificial light spill out into the sidewalk and other areas.”

He continues, “Visually, we knew what we wanted: Large windows that would allow for a nice reflection of the sky, but not so reflective that it would begin to distract from the other parts of the building.”

The significance of the window system captured the attention of *Star Tribune* architectural writer Linda Mack who notes the “the lovely deep window frames on the south façade...create that now-rare architectural experience of light and shadow.” She also observes that the “double-height windows fool the eye, making the building look taller than it is” while the “the varied window design makes the full-block building look more like several buildings.” (12/27/00)

“We envisioned 401 N. Robert as an urban building that would define the block,” adds Sorenson. “By utilizing the warm gray stones of the more recently built structures with the red granite of the older, buildings, we were able to connect the building to the rich tradition of downtown St. Paul. It’s our modern interpretation of an historic warehouse.”

Nationally recognized for its innovative expertise, Wausau Window and Wall Systems is an industry leader in engineering window and curtainwall systems for commercial and institutional construction applications. For 50 years, Wausau has worked closely with architects, building owners and contractors to realize their vision for aesthetic beauty and lasting value, while striving to maintain the highest level of customer service, communication and overall satisfaction.

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