

Healthy building syndrome

by Ethan Jacobs
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New Fenway Community Health HQ will double as community gathering space

Located in the heart of the Fenway neighborhood, within view of both Fenway Park and the Harvard Medical School campus, Fenway Community Health's new building is currently a mostly empty ten-story tower of glass and concrete. But when it opens in April CEO Stephen Boswell expects it will be an eye-catching addition to the local skyline that makes a strong statement about the pride and the power of the LGBT community in Boston.

As Red Sox fans wander along nearby Yawkey Way on game night and look up, they'll see the building lit up in all its splendor - curved lighted walls that will run along the front of each floor will give the building a glowing appearance designed to resemble a Japanese lantern.

"We think it'll make an important statement about the LGBT community in Boston," said Boswell.

Boswell has big plans for Fenway's new headquarters. The building will provide Fenway with space to expand its healthcare services, but it will also allow the organization to expand its research and LGBT advocacy programs. Boswell said the Fenway's research and advocacy arm, the Fenway Institute - which studies and advocates on everything from HIV prevention to inclusion of LGBT issues in federal public health policy to smoking in the LGBT community - will have its own floor in the new facility. He hopes that the Institute becomes a national player in advocating for LGBT rights.

"Our goal is to really take a lot of that new knowledge [produced by the Fenway Institute] and work with partners like HRC [Human Rights Campaign] and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and really create papers and documents that are researched thoroughly by objective science to make arguments for resources for our community. ... As a community we've gotten very far by using political instruments to make our argument, but many of us here at Fenway believe it's now time for us to start to build an infrastructure to do some of the work like virtually all other major constituencies do in support of our community, and that's what this building is about," said Boswell.

Fenway provided *Bay Windows* with a tour of the new building to give a sense of what new resources the organization will have at its disposal to accomplish those goals once it moves into the new headquarters. At 100,000 square feet, the new facility dwarfs the HRC headquarters in Washington D.C., which measures 60,000 square feet, and Boswell said Fenway believes it will be the largest building in the world owned by an organization that has service to the LGBT community as part of its mission statement. Currently Fenway's operations are housed in different buildings around Boston, including its current headquarters at 7 Haviland Street, another facility across the street, and offices in the Prudential Center. The new building will allow Fenway to bring all of its services and programs back under one roof.

Boswell believes the building will transform Fenway's role in Boston's LGBT community by turning the Fenway into a community gathering space. The top two floors of the headquarters will be given over to Fenway's newest venture, a conference center. Currently those floors are almost

entirely empty, like much of the building, but when it opens next year Boswell said the top floor will have a 160-seat auditorium outfitted with top-of-the-line audiovisual equipment, including high definition projection systems, surround sound, and video conferencing capabilities. The floor below will feature a series of breakout rooms with dividing walls that retract into the ceiling, allowing conference organizers to tailor the space to their needs. Fenway will make the space available to LGBT organizations free of charge to hold large gatherings, and Boswell said he sees the space filling a void in Boston, which has never had an LGBT community center.

"We see this conference center as a resource not just for Fenway but a resource for the LGBT community and for the neighborhood to use," said Boswell. "So if we have an issue like marriage, for example, and we need to get together as a group, we want people to think of Fenway and this space as being their space."

The conference center is also designed to elevate Fenway's profile within the Boston medical community. Boswell plans to strengthen its relationship with Harvard Medical School, where all of its physicians hold faculty appointments, and local teaching hospitals by moving many of the lectures taught by Fenway staff to the new conference center. Fenway also plans to hold national conferences related to LGBT health at the center, positioning Boston as one of the nation's leading centers for LGBT health issues.

The building also allows Fenway to expand its medical services. For the first time Fenway will begin offering eye care and dental care to its clients, and entire floors will be dedicated to women's health and mental health care. The building is more than five times the size of the current Haviland Street headquarters. Two of the floors will be leased out to other organizations, giving Fenway space to grow within the building as the organization expands.

Construction of the new building is moving forward, but Fenway is also working to ensure that it raises enough money to continue funding the project. The total price tag for the building is about \$60 million. Philip Finch, Fenway's vice-president of communications and development, said Fenway is funding the building through a variety of sources, including a capital campaign, existing assets and money the organization has saved over the years, the sale of the Haviland Street headquarters, and a financing plan that includes new market tax credits and the assumption of long-term debt. The \$18 million capital campaign includes \$10 million for the building and \$8 million to support Fenway's programs and services.

Finch said Fenway is about \$3.5 million away from its capital campaign goal. The pressure is on the organization to hit that goal by June 30, the official end of the campaign. The Kresge Foundation has pledged \$1.75 million toward the project, but only if the Fenway reaches its goal by the end of the campaign. If Fenway fails to raise enough money, one-tenth of the money from its capital campaign will disappear.

"I'm cautiously confident. I think we are facing a difficult economy. We're competing with a number of wonderful nonprofits in the Boston area that all are in need of important funds," said Finch, who added that many potential donors are also giving to candidates in the run-up to the elections this fall. "But we set a record in our annual fund for Fenway last year despite many of these challenges. ... We're going to need the support of the entire community to make this happen."

Finch said that includes community members who cannot afford to write five and six-figure checks. The Fenway will be holding fundraising events at lower price points, including a \$35 Sept. 7 brunch at Boston's Casa Romero restaurant. Tickets to the Men's and Women's Events will also support the campaign. This fall Fenway will give community members the opportunity to pay to name seats in the new auditorium and to place names on a "Names Wall." The Names Wall from 7 Haviland will be moved to the new building.

"The smaller donors can have a lot of power in numbers. I think we had almost 1000 people

participate in the Names Wall we had. If we got 1000 people to participate this time, that would be a significant amount of money," said Finch, who said a place on the new Names Wall will cost about \$250.

"Most of us don't have 10 or 20 or 50 thousand dollars to give to a building project like this, but we want to make sure we recognize people who help build a part of this community, who help build a gay and lesbian center for Boston."

Boswell said he is excited about the progress of the new building, a project he said Fenway conceived of about six years ago.

"I think in almost every way they're exceeding my expectations, in large part because it's an amazing thing we've managed to do," said Boswell. "When we first started talking about this project I sat around a large conference table with about 30 lawyers representing all sorts of different financing organizations, the federal government, all sorts of people - a very expensive meeting, I might add - to look at the feasibility of doing this. And to think from that place to here has been only about six years is really an amazing thing. And we finally have enough space to do all the things we need space for."