

2021 GOVERNOR'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARDS

Beckman Instruments, Inc. Administration Building



In 1953, Arnold O. Beckman (1900-2004) consolidated his various offices, factories, and laboratories scattered across Pasadena and South Pasadena into one complex, selecting Fullerton as the site of his new headquarters. Over the decades, the firm employed thousands of Fullerton residents, and was a source of community pride and an integral part of Fullerton's postwar economic growth and development.

In 2010, Beckman Coulter moved its headquarters from Fullerton to Brea. The entire Beckman campus sat vacant from 2010 to 2014. When the 43-acre site was purchased in 2015, as part of the City's land-use entitlement process, the Beckman Administration Building was conditioned to be preserved and protected during demolition of the remainder of the site. An early example of Mid-Century Modernism in Fullerton, the Beckman Administration Building, designed by architect Lawrence Whitney Davison, is the best example of this style of architecture applied to a non-residential building in the city. To further protect the Beckman Administration building, the non-profit historic organization, Fullerton Heritage nominated the structure for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Members of the still active Beckman Alumni Association attended meetings and wrote letters in support of preserving their former worksite. The building achieved National Register listing on January 31, 2017.

Newport Beach-based developer Western Realco purchased the 43-acre campus with the intent of constructing a multi-building business park. While specializing in state-of-the-art commercial/industrial projects, Western Realco had never adaptively reused historic buildings. As a result, they were initially reluctant to participate in any efforts to preserve and reuse the Beckman Administration Building. City planning staff and Fullerton Heritage continued to expound the benefits of preserving the building and integrating it into the proposed business park. After additional consideration, Western Realco officials recognized the value the historic building offered and agreed to preserve the Beckman Administration Building and name the new complex the Beckman Business Center to honor the site's history.

Restoration of the building adhered to the Secretary of the Interior Standards. For both the exterior and interior of the building the focus was on preservation and restoration first, and reconstruction of materials or features only when necessary. Additional character defining features around the building were identified including the circular drive and west and east courtyards, all of which were retained and incorporated into the project design and restoration. A.J. Kirkwood and Associates, an electrical engineering and construction firm based out of Tustin, was drawn to the Beckman Building for its iconic mid-century architecture and its historic ties to Beckman Coulter. They purchased the building for their new headquarters and moved into the restored building in December 2019.

The restoration and reuse of the Beckman building is one of the most successful private-public collaborations in Fullerton's history. Without the use of public funds or grants (City, State or Federal), the property owner completed a successful adaptive-reuse project; local preservationists retained a building important to the community; and A.J. Kirkwood gained a beautiful new headquarters for their next 100 years in business, with a bronze interpretive display installed at the main entrance of the building, telling the story and importance of the Beckman Instruments Company and Arnold O. Beckman in the heritage of Fullerton.