

2022 GOVERNOR'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARDS

SMUD Headquarters Building Rehabilitation



Completed in 1960, the Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) Headquarters building brought a significant International Style modernist icon to the Sacramento region. Originally designed by architects Albert M. Dreyfuss, and Leonard D. Blackford of Dreyfuss & Blackford Architects, and landscape architects Ralph Jones and Scott Beamer, the project received national and international attention for its forward-thinking technology that remains relevant today.

The Headquarters Building rehabilitation included a complete renovation of the 120,000 square foot office and 45,000 square foot parking garage and includes an approximately 15,000 square foot expansion to the central core section. Though remarkably intact, there was a clear need for hazardous materials remediation and a detailed cleaning of facade elements to assure longevity over time. In addition, concerns over water intrusion, structural performance in an earthquake, and the need to provide a vibrant workplace for changing generations of staff contributed to the underlying tenets of the design team's approach.

Through a collaborative effort and innovative approaches, carefully considered enhancements were chosen to provide value without compromising the original design concept or overall historic integrity. All work was performed under review by several entities to assure compliance with *The Secretary of the Interior's for the Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings*. The approach to site and landscape improvements emphasized protection of overall landscape patterns and relationships, circulation features, and the stylistic character of the property.

In advance of design and construction, SMUD staged a series of community engagement discussions throughout Sacramento to inform the public and the preservation community about the intent and impact of the project, and ways that the community would be able to interface with the property once complete. This

transparency cultivated trust with regional residents and a strong connection to local preservationists.

A major beloved art feature, a 3,650 square foot glass mosaic by Wayne Thiebaud, encircles the first level of the south wing. The world-renowned artist was virtually unknown at the time (1959) he created his only mural, and it is considered irreplaceable and priceless. Every effort was successfully employed to protect the mural during construction and then carefully restore it as part of the larger exterior rehabilitation. It continues to be a point of community pride, accessible to the public and a source of public accolades.

Just as the SMUD Headquarters building is incredibly important to the Sacramento region as its most significant modernist icon, the rehabilitation project is equally important to efforts of modernist preservation nationwide. The success of this project, and the resulting overwhelming acceptance of it in the preservation community, serves as a shining example of what can be achieved through reverential rehabilitation of treasured modernist resources.