

Clearwater, Tampa lease deals signal employment, company growth

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Clearwater-based business process software company eMason Inc. is more than doubling its space with a nearly 41,000-square-foot lease at the Roosevelt Technology Center in St. Petersburg.

Charlotte-based transportation consulting firm Kimley-Horn and Associates is moving its local office to the Franklin Exchange Building in downtown Tampa.

Both relocations are driven by the need to hire more employees and point toward a recovering economy.

Fast growing eMason has hired 60 people since January and 100 during the past 12 months, raising its total to 175 people, said Chief Operating Officer Mark Goldman. The company is filling about 18 more IT positions that pay \$50,000 to \$100,000.

"New hires will have to wait until we move to come onboard," Goldman said.

Kimley-Horn has hired four senior engineers in recent months, bringing its Tampa total to 23 employees. The company is helping **Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority** develop a bus rapid transit system, among other local projects.

"We are offering more services from our Tampa office and are optimistic about the local market," said David Walthall, office practice leader. "We are looking forward to taking advantage of this great location in the growing downtown area."

Kimley-Horn is moving June 4 to 7,100 square feet at 655 Franklin St., about the same amount of space as its current location at 10117 Princess Palm Ave. in East Tampa. The lease calls for adding 800 square feet next year.

The landmark 22-story downtown office building is owned by The Wilson Company. New York-based **Newmark Knight Frank** brokered the lease. Solutions Inc., headquartered in the same building, is general contractor for the build out.

Improving market

Moving in July, eMason began looking for new space late last year, Goldman said. The company's biggest challenge was finding enough contiguous space in one building instead of being split up in its current location at 4592 Ulmerton Road.

"We have 10 conference rooms in this new space, all of which will be used because that's the nature of our business," Goldman said.

Roosevelt Technology Center, 11399 16th Court N., had been offering 40,647 square feet on the first floor in six suites.

"We made the decision we wanted to lease to a single tenant," said listing agent Mike Talmadge, executive vice president of **Echelon Real Estate Services LLC**. "The leasing economics work better on a single floor. It's better for the tenant and better for the landlord."

Jim Parker, director of commercial services for Colliers International, represented eMason. Ed Taylor Construction South of Tampa is doing the build out.

Defense contractor General Dynamics occupies the second and third floor of the 107,000-square-foot Class A building between Interstate 275 and Gandy Boulevard in the Gateway submarket.

"We definitely wanted to stay in Pinellas," Goldman said. "We spent the last five years recruiting highly skilled people who live in Riverview, Brandon and Bradenton. This Gateway area fits the bill for all those people."

Jane Mason, the company's president and chief executive officer, also lives in Pinellas "and she wants to stay by the water," Goldman said. Mason won the *Tampa Bay Business Journal's* BizTech CEO category earlier this year.

Talmadge said he expects to finalize a 30,000-square-foot lease with another tech company by the end of June.

"We've got a good mix of industries [in Gateway], he said. "We are seeing a lot of companies moving around with 75 to 100 employees. We are starting to see upward pressure on rents because occupancies are getting tight."

Class A rents in desirable submarkets such as downtown Tampa, Westshore and Gateway appear heading north of \$20 per square foot.

Goldman estimated the move and office build out would cost in excess of \$1 million. He emphasized that the company has refused to accept any state or local business retention incentives.

"We feel companies should be able to make their own way," he said. "Times are tough enough for local communities, they shouldn't be giving money to companies that are making money."



Kathleen Cabbie

Tech company eMason is relocating to Roosevelt Technology Center.