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## Lowry Family Health Center: Old base clinic gets update

Denver's changing landscape over the past 20 years has been like a carefully targeted face-lift. The renewed attraction of living and working near downtown has resulted in rejuvenated neighborhoods, as found throughout the Highlands. This transformation has created new neighborhoods, too, such as the glittering buildings in the once grimly industrial Central Platte Valley and the culture-driven area now known as River North.

But for wholesale "repurposing," turning an area known for one use into something completely different, nothing matches Stapleton and Lowry.

The first step in this process of re-creation was a vote in the late 1980s that approved construction of a new Denver airport. Years of intense study and planning began to determine what to do with the land at Stapleton International Airport, which has become an expansive, close-in minicity to the east of downtown Denver. During the planning period for Stapleton, Lowry Air Force Base became part of the Base Realignment and Closure process, and a year before Stapleton closed in 1995, the base ceased operation. Announced in 1991, the closure left city planners and developers with another 3.3 square miles of land, many buildings (some historic) and three runways.

And it prompted a pivotal decision: to hitch Lowry's future to its past. The Lowry Rede-



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velopment Authority chose a strategy that introduced new projects while keeping an eye on the history of the base and its collection of distinguished buildings. Lowry includes two historic districts, and numerous other buildings have been renovated or remodeled to showcase unusual elements. For instance, the huge base steam plant, which provided heat for dozens of buildings at Lowry, has been repurposed as lofts, with its four massive conelike chimneys taking center stage. The former base liquor store is a community church, and the former commissary houses a blood donation center.

Even design cues throughout the Lowry development reference history. The presence of two massive hangars – Hangar 1, housing Wings Over the Rockies Museum, and adjacent Hangar 2, now home to retail operations – has helped influence the look of new development. Curved rooflines and overhangs now dot the Lowry landscape, playing off the hangars' rooflines.

That's the case with the build-

ing that has been home to the Lowry Family Health Center, operated at East 10th Avenue and Yosemite Street by longtime GH Phipps Construction Cos.'s client Denver Health. The building is not historic; nor does it display particularly strong architecture. But it is a building being remade for the future. Lowry records indicate that what was known as Building 752 served as a medical clinic with offices and X-ray services from its construction in the early 1970s until base closure. The current \$6.3 million renovation and addition designed by H+L Architecture and performed by GH Phipps will turn the structure into an updated, airy and welcoming care center. Visitors to the Lowry center, including refugee patients, are now being served in a cluster of modular trailers on the site, set up by GH Phipps to bridge the gap in service. Signs direct patients to the temporary clinic area.

The clinic is being taken apart, gutted, then put back together, with a new exterior, entry area and a more functional interior designed specifically for health care services. Construction is expected to be completed in February. Former precast areas will be covered with stucco, though the existing brick will remain, as will building detailing.

The new entry area will be topped by a series of large, curved, wooden glue-laminated beams, or glulams, which combine the virtues of support

strength with the warm, attractive attributes of wood. The arched form creates the spatial impact of a high barrel-vaulted ceiling while referencing the circular form of the hangars that stand out in the neighborhood. The new entry – in effect, a pop top – will be covered outside with tongue-and-groove decking and the arched beams set into the steel structure.

The 32,000-square-foot building will include clinical pods, dental services, a lab and pharmacy as well as other clinical services, including more than two dozen exam rooms, treatment rooms, offices, a central supply area, and break room and kitchenette. The new entry area will provide space for a waiting room, and reception and registration services. New windows will be installed, and new landscaping will be introduced, befitting a building being given new life. The project in effect involves popping the top of the one-story building, adding height to signal the entry, while changing the building's orientation to provide a patio.

The biggest challenge at the Lowry clinic was dealing with the abundance of asbestos that had to be removed before the building could be dissected, says GH Phipps project manager Ryan Bonner. "Everywhere we turned, we found it. It became a tough job in terms of safety. There was asbestos in every crack."▲