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# Brand new: Arraj Courthouse blends in with surroundings

The Denver Business Journal - September 26, 2003 by [Erin Johansen](#) Denver Business Journal

The Alfred A. Arraj United States Courthouse in downtown Denver -- among the first new federal courthouses to meet higher security standards -- opened in October 2002 and provides more space for the expanding district court.

The 10-story building at 901 19th St. is one of only a few office buildings to go up in that part of downtown in recent years. The Arraj Courthouse is part of the downtown Denver "federal district" that also includes three other federal buildings.

Because security standards for federal buildings have been upgraded as a result of the Oklahoma City federal building bombing and the 2001 terrorist attacks, designers of the new courthouse had to strike a fine balance between public accessibility and safety.

"We wanted to create a building that balances three things: people feeling welcome, safe and professionally served," said Tim Horne, business center manager with the General Services Administration. Horne runs the office that oversees all building services for GSA buildings in downtown Denver.

The GSA serves as a landlord for the federal government and it built and manages the Arraj Courthouse on behalf of the district court. The U.S. Marshals also are a tenant in the building.

The building was a \$75 million project and was built by **PCL Construction Services** of Denver. The architectural team included Anderson Mason Dale Architects of Denver along with Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum.

Curtis Berg oversaw construction for the GSA.

In addition to the security requirements, the building was designed with high sustainability and energy-efficiency standards and with the most advanced technology available.

"When you come into the building, it needed to be secure but not obvious. Also very high tech and the best design for the courts. We also wanted it to be a 'green' building," said Janet Preisser, special programs coordinator with the GSA.

Another goal was to build within the criteria of the "GSA Design Excellence Program," Horne said. "Basically, we want to build buildings that add to and improve the architecture of any city where we build a building," Horne said.

And overall, the GSA is committed to working with downtown Denver regarding both the new building and the overall downtown federal district, Horne said.

"The feedback I've received over the last four years about the four blocks in Denver is that we've made an attempt to be a good neighbor in downtown Denver," Horne said.

"Especially as more residential pops up down here, we want to connect Curtis Park to the 16th Street Mall and that's our goal."

Anne Warhover, president of the Downtown Denver Partnership, said the new federal courthouse and the entire district is positive for downtown Denver.

Warhover said cities all over the country are working to land new federal buildings.

In Denver, there has been a lot of cooperation by the district with the city and downtown neighbors, she said.  
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"The federal government is trying to make it more people-friendly and pedestrian-oriented even with the security. They're also trying to blend it with the Curtis Park neighborhood," Warhover said.

"Just having the density of employees there is very positive. Some people don't like the amount of security, but that doesn't offset the upside," Warhover said.

The Downtown Denver Partnership was part of a brainstorming session with the GSA that focused on the downtown federal district and related issues.

Overall, operations have gone smoothly since the Arraj Courthouse opened last year, Horne said.

"Luckily we've had some experience with building new buildings both here and other places. We've had a lot of lessons learned along the way. We were very prepared for the break-in of the building. The biggest measure of success is that the building break-in period has not caused any disruption in court business," Horne said. "We're going through the first heating and cooling season and you learn a lot about the building -- but it's going really well."

"I think our goals were met because the courts are very happy," Preisser said. "They're the client and they're very happy with their space."

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