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HKS weighs expansion options

Business boom fuels need for new hires, additional space

BY CHRISTINE PEREZ | STAFF WRITER

Often cast in the role of designing office solutions for other companies, Dallas-based HKS Inc. is facing a space dilemma of its own, having outgrown its 92,000-square-foot corporate headquarters on McKinney Avenue in Uptown.

Seeing business take off in virtually all of its divisions, the architecture and engineering firm has added 70 employees in Dallas so far this year, bringing the total to about 550. It employs another nine in Fort Worth.

To accommodate its growing ranks, HKS has leased 15,000 square feet nearby at 1909 Woodall Rodgers Fwy. to house about 50 structural engineering employees. CEO Ralph Hawkins said the company is mulling over four more permanent options.

"One is to expand our corporate building, but because ownership of adjacent property is so diverse, I don't have my hopes up," he said. "Another option is to move into a building in the West End, which would be an interesting location. We've also been approached by a property owner about having our own building near the Victory development. A fourth option would be to find or build a building outside of downtown, but our desire is to



DESIGNING MEN: Principals, from left, Dan Jeakins, Mark Williams, Joe Buskuhl and CEO Ralph Hawkins help lead the way at architecture and engineering firm HKS Inc.

stay in the downtown area."

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Hawkins expects to hire another 25 to 30 people in Dallas this year and 15 in Fort Worth. Beyond that, the goal is to concentrate on growth at other regional offices. Besides Texas, where HKS does about 30% of its work, the firm also is active in Florida, California and mid-Atlantic markets. It has a total of 10 U.S. offices, plus shops in Mexico City, Mexico, and London. In total, including North Texas, HKS has about 815 employees.

"Firm-wide, we've added 190 people in January through July," he said. "For a firm our size, that's a lot of people. It's the largest expansion we've ever gone through."

A major player in the health care arena, HKS also is seeing an increase in aviation, education, hospitality and retail activity. The sports group also has fared well, picking up the next two new NFL venues, a stadium for the Indianapolis Colts that's scheduled to open in 2003, and the Dallas Cowboys' new 75,000-seat stadium in Arlington, which will also include between 200 and 300 suites.

Locally, HKS has picked up the lion's share of corporate office projects, including a 1.3 million-square-foot office campus in Las Colinas for Citigroup, a 120,000-square-foot headquarters for Fluor Corp., also in Las Colinas, and a 550,000-square-foot redevelopment for First American Corp. at the Solana business park in Westlake.

"It's a very exciting project," said Dan Jeakins, principal and director of the firm's commercial group of the First American project. "We're taking four existing buildings and adding a glass box connector to create 100,000-square-foot floorplates."

HKS also has been tapped to design nearly all of the large speculative office buildings being considered in downtown Dallas and in Uptown, most in the 300,000-to 350,000-square-foot range. Even in the recent office-construction downturn, the firm picked up sizeable jobs, including RadioShack's 900,000-square-foot headquarters in Fort Worth, which opened earlier this year.

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