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### Buildings and Dirt

A commercial real estate blog writer trends and gossip from Metro Detroit

About Me: I'm a reporter covering real estate, retail and hospitality for Crain's Detroit Business.... [more »](#)

## Cool office, long story

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I had the chance to get a look around at the new United Way offices in Detroit, easily the coolest office space opened in recent history.

The Roxbury Group used the space for its holiday party last night, showing off their handy-work because they handled the construction management and were the ones on the deal.

It's been a long road for that office, as it not only sits at the crux of downtown Detroit, Campus Martius, but also at the crux of several interesting news stories.

So in addition to being moved by the urban-loft quality of the office space, I've just to see it built.

My own history with the office space started in October, 2007 when I **broke** news that the architecture firm Hamilton Anderson planned to move to the 35,000-sq-ft office.

A few months later, I was given a tour of the raw, vacant space by a few of the Hamilton Anderson architects. They were thrilled to be moving into the space, taking the area that was once used as the grand bank for First National Bank -- not to mention overlooking the Campus Martius park, which they had a hand in designing. With massively high ceilings, they had a cool idea to build "mezzanine floors" for office area so there would be sort-of half-floors. Like little lofts overlooking the office. Nobody in town has half-floors like that with the exception of the Bode Ford Field.

The Hamilton Anderson deal fell apart for various reasons, mostly the fault of the landlord The Northern Group, which claimed the mezzanine floors were not included in the original square footage of the lease and as a result they wanted an extension out of Hamilton Anderson.

In the resulting lawsuit (read my coverage [here](#)), Hamilton Anderson attorneys pointed out they took the landlords up in a scissor lift to clearly show them what the mezzanine floors would look like.

Nonetheless, the deal tanked.

The Roxbury Group then convinced the United Way to bail out on a deal they considering to be part of; the multi-tenant portion of the redeveloped Argona in New Center.

Then, as the United Way construction started chugging along, plenty of probl stirred up over the First National Building's owner, the Northern Group.

By "problems," I mean they weren't paying their mortgage and the building w default with tenants such as the Honigman lawfirm suing to get out of their le leave due to horrible conditions.

The United Way construction moved on, and tenants I've talked to are much the Farmington Hills-based Friedman Group running the building as court-app receiver. Friedman's appointment is a story in its own, since founder Dave Fri owned the building 15 years ago, and I hear the security guards are wearing uniforms.

So, at the end of the road, it's great to see that the United Way moved into th space and the Roxbury Group did a great job on a tight budget to build it out With the lights of the downtown Christmas tree shining, people ice skating in and the Compuware building towering over the small circle, I don't think you better view of Detroit's best pocket of vibrancy.

If you can find a way, I strongly encourage you to talk your way into a tour o space, it's really amazing.

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