



Colliers Gets the Call at Cross Point

BY JOE CLEMENTS

LOWELL — One of New England's most imposing suburban office properties is embarking on a quest to fill hundreds of thousands of square feet, and the owners of Cross Point have tabbed Colliers International to lead the charge, Senior VP Matthew Daniels confirmed to The Real Reporter on Thursday.

"We are," Daniels says of being the team that beat out stiff competition for the listing that covers 1.2 million sf in three conjoined buildings at the juncture of Interstate 495, Route 3 and the Lowell Connector. Besides



Matthew Daniels

Daniels, 900 Chelmsford St. will be handled by VP Christopher Lawrence and Assistant VP Brian Tisbert. The full-service capabilities of Colliers will be employed to support the campaign, vows Daniels. "We're jumping right in," he says.



Christopher Lawrence

Although Cross Point is barely 70 percent occupied, and has seen sizable departures such as Dassault Systemes and Parexel, Daniels argues the dynamics are far different than when Cross Point faced its darkest days in the mid-1990s, forsaken by struggling Wang Computers and thrust



Brian Tisbert

into foreclosure, only to be famously scooped up for a bargain-basement price by a group of local investors who turned a seemingly Quixotic restoration plan into what has often been termed New England's deal of the decade. The subsequent restructuring breathed new life into the asset, which was sold for \$108 million in 1998 to a partnership of DivcoWest and Yale Properties.

Daniels explains much of the latter-day vacancy stems from firms taken over by



Cross Point, Lowell MA

larger players in the new era of corporate takeovers and mergers. "In some ways, Cross Point is a victim of its own success," he says. "It offers an environment where companies can prosper and grow, and that often makes them (a merger target) . . . It has happened a lot there." Dassault came on board the Cross Point roster via a merger, then spirited those employees down to a consolidated campus in Waltham last year. Parexel is also consolidating its operations, in that firm's case moving down Route 3 to Billerica.

Daniels anticipates the improved economy will bring more prospects to the corridor, and says he believes Cross Point serves as a de facto recruiting tool. "It's first class all the way," he says. "It has unsurpassed amenities, tremendous access and the flexible space tenants are looking for today." A proven, credit-worthy landlord also is a must for many tenants these days.

Interstate 495 North has been among the loosest office markets in Massachusetts since the recession, but 2011 ended with a six-figure gain in net absorption, according to Colliers research. That 183,000-sf boost for 25,1 million sf in I-495 North did only reduce vacancy to 23.1 percent versus a suburban average of 18.8 percent, but brokers say there are multiple large tenants conducting searches at present, some being squeezed north as the Route 128 office market continues to tighten and rents there appear ready for potential growth. If that

occurs, the value aspect of I-495 North could return, especially given the improved ease of access thanks to the widening of Route 3 between Burlington and Lowell. "Route 3 is like being on Interstate 93," says Daniels. "It's a real highway now."

It is unclear who else might have been on the short list of candidates as Cross Point broker, but the Colliers team that has been operating for several years does have a proven track record of filling cavernous properties. "Sure," a professional at a rival firm accedes of whether Colliers is up to the task, noting the same professionals have tackled other complex properties in the region. Daniels declined to detail other assignments, but concurs that the Cross Point Towers is a coveted assignment for any firm, enhancing their desire to produce results. "We're absolutely thrilled," he says, terming 900 Chelmsford St. a "landmark" address that even with some leaving still boasts a roster of leading companies such as JPMorgan Chase, Metropolitan Life and Verizon. The landlord successfully re-upped major occupant Motorola in 2011, among the submarket's most important conquests.

Developed by Wang in the 1970s, the trio of 14-story buildings has plenty of room for special touches, including a 500-seat auditorium, fitness center, corporate catering facilities and two full-service cafeterias. There is also a bank, hair salon and Starbuck, while new lobby upgrades are to be completed this year. ■