

New office building in South End

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A new three-story office building planned for South Church Street could help bridge the gap between uptown and South End.

Flores & Associates LLC plans to move its headquarters from uptown to the 20,000-square-foot "green" structure in about a year.

Mario Flores Jr., president of the 23-year-old reimbursement plans administrator, said he searched for three years for a location near uptown, where the firm's office is now.

The one-acre tract at 1218 S. Church St. is across from a townhome development in an older commercial area and within about a quarter of a mile of two light-rail transit stops.

Real estate watchers expect the area to become more attractive to office developers because of its proximity to transportation and residences.

A commercial-residential mix is something South End leaders favor as property is redeveloped along South Church between Carson Boulevard and Bland Street.

"We always love to see mixed-use with places for employees to live within walking distance of workplaces and transit stops," said James Mathis III, director of Historic South End. "For the past three years in South End, residential has ruled the day."

Stephen Overcash, whose Overcash-Demmitt Architects designed the new building, said the area is on the fringe of South End today, but "it will be in the heart of everything in another five years."

Commercial projects are sparse this year in Charlotte as the economy sputters and developers experience trouble securing financing.

In Mecklenburg County, first quarter commercial building permits plunged 63 percent from a year earlier.

Flores said his long-term relationship with First Citizens Bank helped him secure 100 percent financing.

He expects demolition of an old industrial building on his site on South Church Street to begin in about 30 days.

The 22-employee firm, which occupies about 11,000 square feet at 200 S. Tryon St., will double its square footage and gain space to grow when the \$5 million-plus project is finished, he said.

He added that business is growing during the down economy for Flores & Associates, which administers employee reimbursement programs ranging from flexible spending accounts to transportation expenses for employers in 34 states.

Overcash-Demmitt Architects and general contractor Myers & Chapman Inc. are aiming for a building that will meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) silver certification standards.

What that means, Overcash said, is the project will earn points for such things as being an infill development, emphasizing natural light, installing solar collectors and including a roof garden and employee showers and fitness facilities.

In addition, he said, the construction team will save big trees on the site and use them to shade a 48-space parking lot. Flores said the firm's employees like the amenities and the skyline views they will have from a rooftop terrace.

Will Whitley and Scott Mileham of New South Properties of the Carolinas assisted in the site search and property acquisition, and Steve Petrone of Trade & Tryon Properties represented the seller.



This is what Flores & Associates' new South End building will look like. Employees will enjoy skyline views from a rooftop terrace. OVERCASH-DEMMITT ARCHITECTS