

## TEAM EFFORT

# Fresh Approach Drives Construction Deadline Push

BY LAUREN M. LARSON  
SPECIAL TO BANKER & TRADESMAN

Steward Health Care is the second-largest healthcare system in New England. The organization is moving fast, and so did the recent build-out of their 30,000-square-foot corporate headquarters at 500 Boylston St in Boston.

Steward management had a non-negotiable move-in date of Feb. 1. The project was awarded to Commodore Builders of Newton on Nov. 18, 2010. The entire design team was assembled within one week. The construction duration, typically 25 weeks for a project of this scope, was instantly compressed, leaving 11 weeks to program, design, permit and build the space. A radically different attitude and construction approach was put in place to meet the schedule.

According to Tom Comeau, Commodore's principal in charge of the project, "Michael Crowley, Steward's vice president of corporate real estate and facilities, set the tone early in the process and our team responded. Mr. Crowley made the critical nature of this project known to us, reinforcing our determination to complete it on time and budget. We didn't know all that was going on behind the scenes at Steward, but we knew this project was the beginning of something big. No one on the team wanted to be the one to drop the ball."

The team included architects Visnick & Caulfield and Silverman Trykowski Associates, C3 Engineers, building owner Equity Office and property manager Hines.

## Streamlined Approach

The success of the project was characterized by six unique elements that streamlined the project approach:

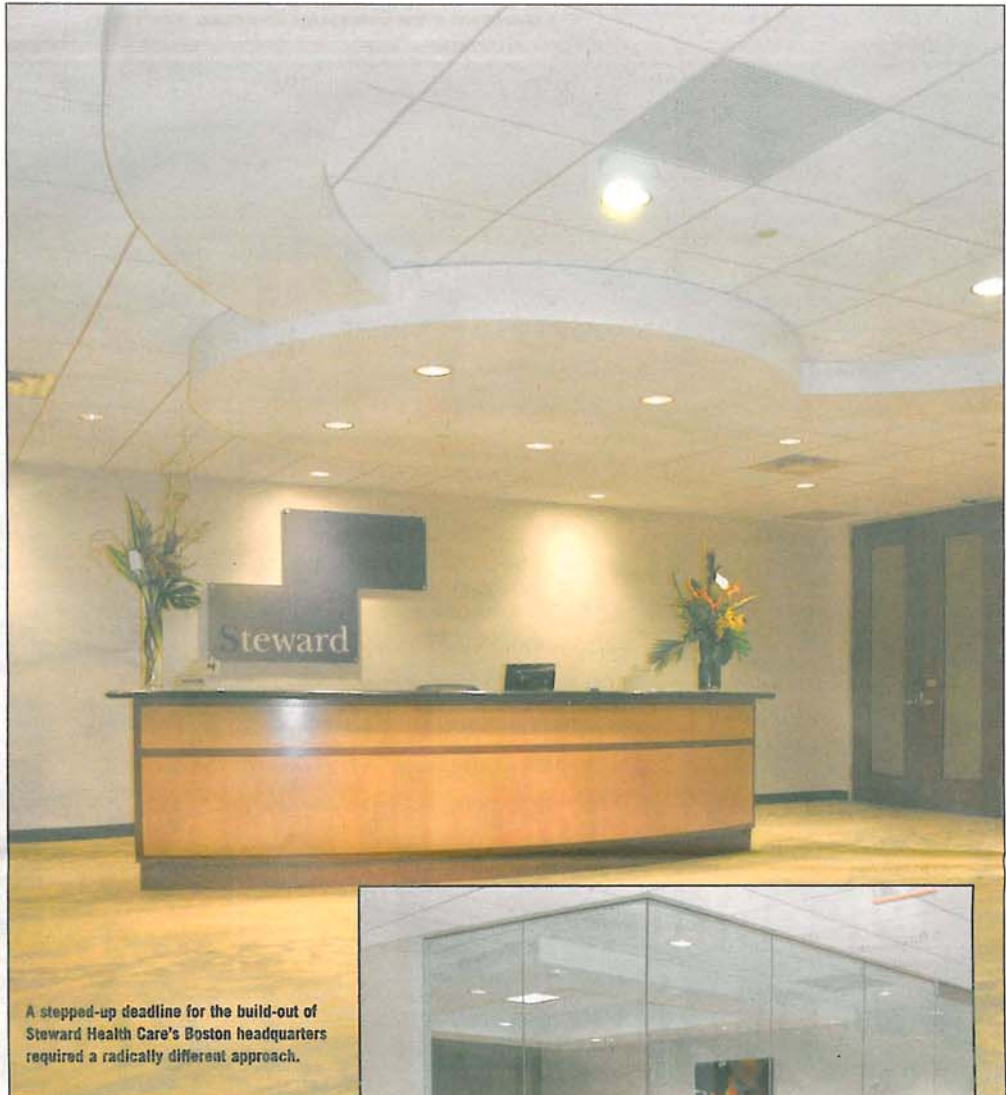
**The right team.** Steward hand-picked the team, knowing the engineer, the architect and the construction manager would have to work closely, communicate constantly and respond rapidly in the field. Success hinged on solid trust and the confidence that all the members of the team knew their role and were capable of meeting the schedule. Every problem was the entire team's problem to solve. The conventional boundaries around construction management responsibilities disappeared. The spirit that pervaded the project team also influenced external stakeholders, including the landlord, property manager and building owner who agreed to work quickly to get the necessary approvals and infrastructure in place.

**Timely decisions.** The schedule had zero tolerance for delayed decisions. Crowley was the point person for Steward to make all design, schedule and cost decisions. The team had a clear path and round-the-clock access to direct decision-making.

**Focus on project set-up.** From the instant the conceptual design was released for budgeting and pricing, the focus on procurement and schedule was relentless. A pre-construction team priced the materials, confirmed lead times and got subcontractors on board.

**Less formality.** The team couldn't get stuck on formality. Documentation took a back seat to execution. If there was a question, the architect went to the field that day, addressed the issue, and the solution was implemented that day. Lengthy e-mail trails and status reports were replaced by ad-hoc conference calls whenever decisions needed to be made. There were no barriers to progress and none of the typical analysis paralysis that can accompany the construction process.

**Early momentum.** A day-by-day plan was



A stepped-up deadline for the build-out of Steward Health Care's Boston headquarters required a radically different approach.

"We were the offensive linemen, clearing one obstacle after another so Steward could make their goals."

COMMODORE PROJECT MANAGER  
TOM ENSMINGER

put in place, and each member of the team hit every schedule milestone in the first three weeks. The momentum created by that early lead generated a performance culture within the team. Every member was invested in holding up their end of the project.

"At the beginning of a football game, players are anxious about the ability to win. A commanding lead early in the game, like the one we got in preconstruction, eliminated the pre-game jitters, and our team was propelled down the field with the confidence that comes from nailing every milestone," said Commodore's Project Manager Tom Ensminger. "We were the offensive linemen, clearing one obstacle



Photos Contributed by Commodore Builders

after another so Steward could make their goals."

## Divide And Conquer

Every element of the 25-week schedule still needed to be accomplished in the 11-week schedule.

Appropriate staffing was the key to success. A divide-and-conquer mentality sprung up, as one superintendent focused on the building and inspectional services relationships, and the other focused on schedule and subcontractors. In the office, the senior project manager focused on managing the subcontractors, while the project manager focused on request for information submittals and financial management. Parallel functions and clear

expectations enabled the team to cover ground in less time.

According to Commodore's Comeau, the unique approach to the Steward project addressed an accelerated schedule, but the focus on project set-up and the performance culture that took hold within the team is a direct result of the way Steward set the tone for the project, then selected the right team and removed the barriers to their performance. According to Comeau, "All projects can benefit from that approach."

LAUREN M. LARSON is vice president for organizational development at Commodore Builders in Newton. E-mail: [larson@commodorebuilders.com](mailto:larson@commodorebuilders.com)